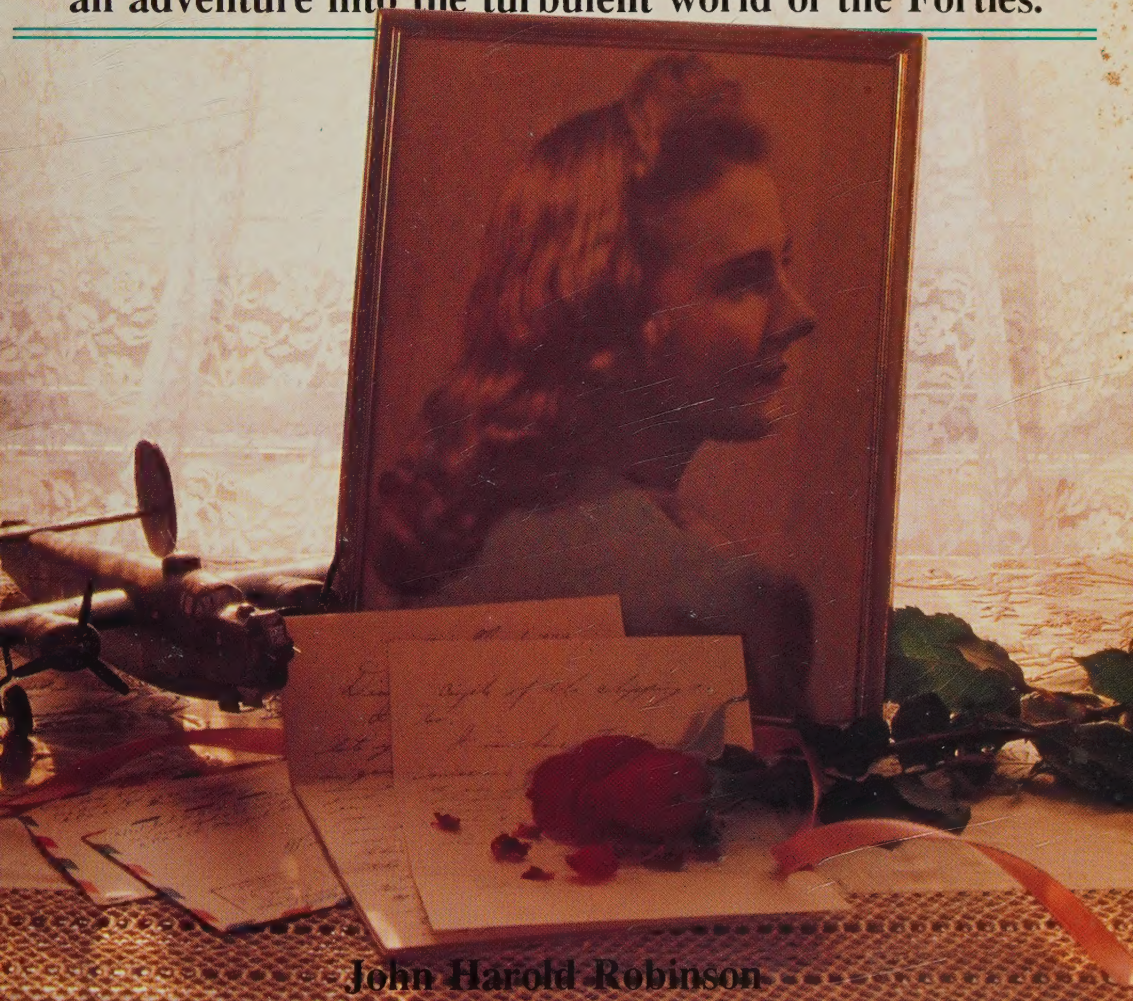


# A Reason To Live

Moments of Love, Happiness and Sorrow . . .  
an adventure into the turbulent world of the Forties.



John Harold Robinson

"One of the finest historical documents I have ever seen!"

Major General Andrew Low, USAF Ret.  
Adjunct Professor, USC Ret.  
Narragansett, Rhode Island

*A Reason to Live* comes out of the turbulent world of the 1940s when millions of young people were suddenly thrust into historic roles for which they had no special preparation. It tells of all the small daily events that changed the course and direction of their lives and of the nation itself.

Direct in style and rich in human emotions and detail, it is the story of love and war as it has been lived by millions of young men and women throughout history and in every nation.

It captures the joy of the victor and the survivor as well as the long shadow of fear and tension on the eve of battle, and the shattering fear in the midst of combat.

Here is the lingering sorrow for comrades who do not return from the battle, the loneliness and the boredom between missions, nights filled with excitement mixed with dread, days filled with both laughter and fear. Here is the sometimes strange presence of God when all else fails and is lost. Here is the sorrow of watching others give up their desire to live.

Here is the movie star, Jimmy Stewart, dedicated to the welfare of his men and determined to fly the most dangerous aerial missions with them.

(Continued on back flap. )

To: J.P. Killough.  
A fellow Serviceman

May the memories never be forgotten.  
Best wishes,

John Harold Robinson  
Author  
2/23/90

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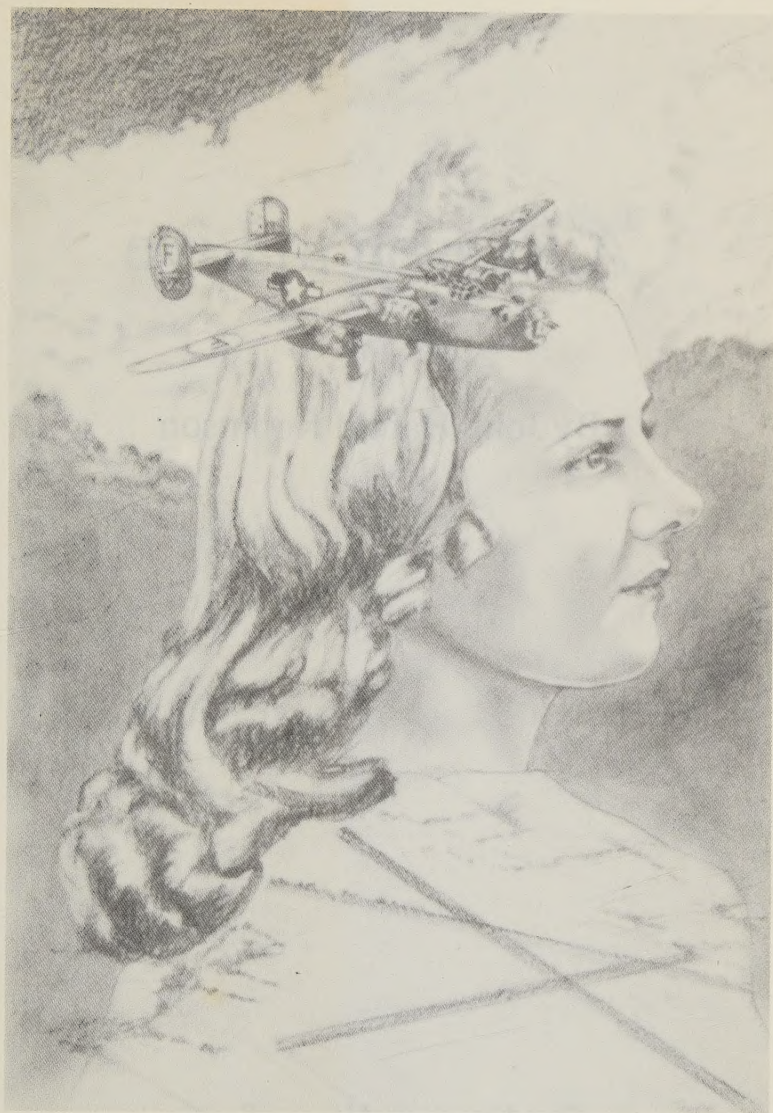
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A reason to live . . .

# A Reason to Live

By John Harold Robinson

*The American Heroes Series*

**CASTLE BOOKS**

To Elizabeth

# A Reason to Live

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John Harold Robinson

# A Reason to Live

CASTLE BOOKS



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# In the Beginning

It's cold and damp, this Thanksgiving night of 1943. I find myself in a new and unfamiliar place, trying to get some sleep after many hours of flying and tense moments this day. All I can think about is my wife, my sweetheart, my only love - my Elizabeth - as I lie here in a strange bunk in a quiet English countryside, several miles north of London. I reach out one arm from under the eight heavy blankets that cover me. I find Elizabeth's picture and her last letter that came to me two weeks ago in the U.S.A. I carried them in my flight suit while we flew half way around the world. I have read the letter over and over. Each time I read it, Elizabeth feels near me.

I can hardly see the words on the letter, in the dim light of the little electric bulb hanging on the end of a cord in the center of this strange new hut. Dimly, I see the exhausted men of my bomber flight crew sleeping heavily on the bunks around me.

I push back the heavy blankets on top of me and pull my heavy overcoat around my shoulders. The pot bellied stove at the end of my bunk is so small that I could wrap my arms all the way around it. Even with a small fire in its little pot belly, the damp air in the hut is cold.

The warmth coming from the little round stove makes me sense the warmth of Elizabeth in the silence of this lonely Thanksgiving night.

I find a few pieces of paper. Holding her picture and her last letter, I try to put down some words to her.

It is very late.

We had been married only two weeks after dating for a year and a half, when my Army life began. She was the only thing in life that meant anything to me, other than feeling that our freedom in this world was worth fighting for.

I begin to write.

My Dear Elizabeth, My Beautiful, Lovable Wife. I miss you so very much. I am sitting here on the end of my bunk in the middle of the night. It is damp and cold in this little hut, on my first night in England. There is only a little light coming from the one small light bulb here in the hut. It is the middle of the night and I just could not sleep, thinking about you. I can almost feel you so very close to me when the pot bellied stove radiates heat waves between the drafts. Its warmth makes me seem to feel you in my arms and near me.

Today we arrived at our permanent base in England. What a place it is. Plenty of mud and rain. It is Thanksgiving and I sure do miss our Thanksgivings together. I am so thankful that God in heaven brought us together. I do feel that he will allow us to return to each other.

The Thanksgiving dinner today was "C" rations. Maybe a turkey dinner, the next time Thanksgiving comes around. After the past two weeks of flying half way around the world, I am thankful to be at our final destination safely. Some of the other air crews did not make it. Tonight I feel so depressed and alone. The rest of the crew are in their sacks under all their blankets and clothes, trying to stay warm. All is quiet but I don't think they are all asleep. I saw E. O. Cross move a little and look at me. I am about to get over a case of diarrhea that developed in Africa, on the way over. The "C" rations didn't help much.

Though I could eat but very little.

The warm feeling of your presence beside and close to me tonight, lifted some of the depressed feelings that I have. I do love you so very much. We will be together again so don't give up hope. Take care of yourself for me. The pot bellied stove is about to go out. The warmth is leaving it and my overcoat is not doing much good. I am going to crawl back into the sack under my eight blankets. Your picture and letter will be beside me. There is so much that I want to say to you but I know the Army would censor it out. Good night, my dear wife. I love you so very much. Your husband, Harold.

I crawled back into the sack under my blankets, still wearing my overcoat. Soon a warm feeling of security and love filled me. I must have fallen asleep soon.

The next thing I knew, I woke from a deep sleep with Elizabeth's picture and letter still gripped in my hand. Maybe it was just the dampness, or Dabbs grumbling something about the pot bellied stove not having any fire in it. Dabbs got up and started trying to get a fire going with wet coal. The words he was using were not in any dictionary. I crawled out of the sack with my overcoat on and walked over to the door and stuck my head outside. The weather was awful. Drizzling rain, damp, cold, foggy, all rolled up into one. I guessed the temperature was near freezing, though I didn't see any ice anywhere. Dabbs started screaming at me, "Close the damned door!" I closed the door, walked back to my sack and sat on the end of it next to the pot bellied stove.

I reached over and picked up Elizabeth's letter and her picture from under the blankets and put them in my pocket. I was beginning to feel a bit of heat coming from the little stove. Dabbs had poured a whole bottle of cigarette lighter fluid in the stove to get the wet coal to burn. My next problem was to find a way to get myself cleaned up and shaved without going out in the rain and weather. I just wanted to sit on the end of the sack where I had felt the presence of Elizabeth last night. But it wasn't the same this morning. The little bit of warmth I felt now was just coming from that miserable little pot bellied stove.

I just sat there on the end of the sack, hypnotized by the red belly on the little stove. I began to think about all that had taken place. I started daydreaming about how I got involved in all of this. "Why am I here? Why can't I just go back to my wife, Elizabeth?"

It must have had a beginning somewhere. There is always a beginning, or is there? I became lost in thought as my past seemed to become real before me.

## My Angel Appears

This tale deals with only a small period of time out of the past. You may think, "How can this be so important to remember, when compared to a full lifetime of other events?" Those of you who read this story and have lived through these events will know. Those of you who did not live through this time, but read this story,

will have some idea of how such events become etched in one's memory, and the memory of our race, never to be forgotten.

My military career started much like the military careers of most of the other sixteen million young Americans pressed into service, starting in 1941. In October, after a long work day, I arrived home late in the afternoon. My bride was standing in the door of our home. She was waiting for me. We had been married a full two weeks. With tears in her eyes, my beautiful wife held her hand out and gave me a letter. It was an official looking letter. I will never forget the words, as I stood there reading them aloud. "Your Friends and Neighbors have selected you to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States of America for the duration."

I had been hearing about letters like this but I thought it would be a long time before I would receive one. After all, life was just beginning to mean something to me. Only days before, I had married a beautiful blond young lady, tall, slender and trim. I had just found someone who really cared for, loved and wanted me. Now, on the 14th of that month, I would be 21 years old.

My military experience had begun in high school days when I took Reserve Officer Training Corps classes. It was required. Someone must have known that a war was not too far into the future for our nation. I was given a uniform and a real 1903 Springfield Army rifle to drill with. My drill instructor was an old master sergeant who had served in World War I. He was a member of the regular Army and as tough as any drill instructor I ever met. Under his stern eye, I quickly advanced to the rank of sergeant major where my advancement came to an abrupt halt. To rise further in rank, to become a Cadet officer, I would have to buy a saber which was part of the officer's ceremonial uniform.

Buying a saber was out of the question. My folks spent all they had for food and clothes. I knew I was somewhat better off than many of the other kids at my school. But to use our money to buy a ceremonial saber simply in order that I could rise further in the R.O.T.C. ranks, was a luxury that my family could not afford.

In 1937, along came the Great Flood on the mighty Mississippi River. The R.O.T.C. Cadets moved in to help people who were driven from their homes by the flood waters. Working alongside the National Guard to manage the masses of people fleeing to the high ground at Memphis, high school Cadets helped take refugees off the boats, the buses and trains and into temporary health stations where doctors and nurses worked around the clock,

giving them shots and vaccines. It was an unforgettable lesson in human suffering.

Many of the families from the bottom lands could not speak the English language too well. Some had never seen a streetcar before, or a train or an auto. It was America in 1937, yet some of them had never seen a bathroom and did not know how one worked. When there was not enough doctors and nurses to give the refugees shots and medication, they taught the Cadets how to give them. Some of the refugees would just give up and sit down in the health station and die. To handle the bodies of some of those who passed away, was a real experience for me.

Two years later, I graduated from Humes High, the school where twelve years later, Elvis Presley, the King of Rock and Roll would graduate.

Very few went on to college in those days, and if you found a job opening, there were forty other people scrambling for it, too. I knew I would have to create my own job if I was going to work at all.

Creating a job was not easy. I started visiting one of the larger hotels in Memphis after school each day. The machinery in their power plant fascinated me. I loved to work with it. I went by the hotel every day for four months. The evening crew began to think that I was an employee. I asked questions and helped them out - often working a full evening shift with the crew. One night, the hotel's chief engineer called me into his office. He wanted to know who I was and why I was there so much. After he heard my story, he felt sorry for me. It was hard for him to believe that I had been working there as long as I had. He said, "Son, if you want a job that bad, I'll give you one. You can be my oiler and run the freight elevator when you are not oiling." I felt like a rich man that night as I walked home: I worked ten hours a day, seven days a week, and had a salary of a dollar a day. What luck!

In the first month of 1940 I was given a new position in the engine room. I started learning to be an operating engineer on steam boilers and refrigeration machinery. An increase in salary came with it. I still worked seven days a week but only nine hours a day instead of ten. Plus, I would now get twenty dollars a week instead of seven.

I knew I was on my way to making a living.

One day in the engine room, a "miracle" happened. I walked the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Beautiful blond hair. Warm brown eyes, and everything else that it takes to make a girl

beautiful. I mean, everything. This angel entered with another young lady who had come to see her father who was the hotel's chief engineer. As the two young ladies stood waiting in the engineer's office, I made it a point to go in and be introduced to them. When I looked at the beautiful blond, I saw a soft halo glowing around her face and head. I came out of the office in a daze and said to the engineer who was still down in the engine room, "You see that beautiful blond young lady waiting in the office?" He said, "Yea." I said, "I am going to marry her."

The engineer chuckled. "That will be the day."

As the two young ladies were leaving the engine room office, my heart began to sink. I just couldn't let this beautiful blond angel walk out of my life. An idea exploded in my mind. I ran to the front desk of the hotel, borrowed a car from the desk clerk who was a friend of mine, rushed down to the garage and drove my friend's car around to the hotel's back entrance. The two young ladies were just walking out the back.

I was completely out of breath. All of this had happened in seconds. I drove alongside the two young ladies and said, "May I drive you girls home?"

The pretty blond said, "We were going to take a streetcar but a ride would be very nice of you."

Her voice left me limp. I reached over and pushed open the door.

I wasn't sure what was happening to me. I didn't care about my job, or anything else in the world at that moment. This beautiful blond angel was going to be my life. A halo seemed to glow around her hair as she got in the front seat beside me. The other young lady got into the back seat. She was pretty, also, but I hardly knew that she existed.

On the drive to their home, I learned that the angel's name was Virginia Elizabeth. She wanted to be called Elizabeth. We didn't find much to say. We didn't want to. Words didn't seem to fit. Mostly we drove in silence with an occasional look at each other. I finally reached over and touched her hand. I started to say something. She said, "Do you have a pencil?" I nodded and handed her one. She took a scrap of paper from her purse and wrote her name, address, and phone number on it. "I guess this is what you were wanting," she said. "I was just going to ask you for it," I said. "We must both be thinking the same thing. How did you know I wanted your phone number?" She said, "I just knew." Then that beautiful face turned a little red. It was a very pretty red.

As I drove on down the street, hardly knowing where I was, I thought, "How could I be so lucky to find a beautiful angel?" I was really falling in love for the first time in my life. There had been high school sweethearts but no one like this. When I stopped in front of her house, she held my hand tight and said, "Goodbye." I shook my head. "No goodbyes. I'll see you tomorrow night." She said, "Phone me and find out." As I drove away, I thought I was on my way to heaven. I could not believe I had met such a person. My dream - my real dream - was coming true. "Can she be real?" I wondered.

I called my angel and made a date with her. After a year of ups and downs, of dating and going together, I finally asked her to marry me and she accepted.

My angel worked at a Memphis aircraft factory, building B-25s, a typical wartime "Rosie the Riveter." With her few dollars and my few dollars, we lived very comfortably after we married. We both were happy. Our marriage had truly been made in heaven. We enjoyed our work, though we didn't like leaving each other to go to work. I rushed home to see her each night and she was always waiting for me by the time that I got home.

Now you know how I felt when I climbed our front steps late one day and found my angel standing in the doorway, holding a letter from our "Friends and Neighbors."

For us, World War II, up until this time, had only been a distant chatter with occasional reports on radio news programs and bits of film shown in newsreels at the local movie house. It had all seemed so far away. I knew, of course, that the Japs had bombed our ships and sailors at rest in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. I remembered having to get out a map to look up where Pearl Harbor was. I had heard the news, that fateful Sunday morning, just after I landed my Cub J-3 private plane. I had been on a solo flight, to build up air time. Paying for all my flying time was a bigger worry than the war had ever been.

Suddenly, the big tears in my angel's eyes made the war very near and important to me.

My angel and I did not speak about the letter except in muted tones. When the day came for me to go take my physical exam for the Army, neither of us could say a word. We hugged and kissed goodbye. I was really only going across town for the day but you would have thought I was leaving my angel forever.

I arrived that morning early at the Community Center on Chelsea Avenue. There was already a long line of young men,

about my age or younger. We waited in line for more than two hours before the line finally started moving. I said, "If I stand here much longer I don't believe I can pass a physical of any kind." A clerk took my letter from my "Friends and Neighbors" and gave me a little card. "Go through the next door," he said. In the room there was a doctor, I think. At least, he had on a white coat.

"Open your mouth," he said.

I thought maybe he was counting my teeth, the way he was poking a stick in it.

"Next," he said.

I moved on to the next man in a white coat. This guy said, "Drop your pants and pull down your shorts."

I had never been told this before, especially in front of people.

"Bend over and grab your ankles," he said.

I felt something touch my back end.

He tapped me and said quietly, "You have one. Move on. Next."

The next doctor listened to my heart. "Next."

Somewhere along the line, they found out that I had two arms, two legs, two feet, a body and a head. They marked me "1-A," eligible to be drafted into military service, and gave me a date to meet a train at Union Station that would take me to an Army base in Georgia.

I had about two weeks before my train left. Elizabeth and I decided that we would both continue to work. We needed to pay off some of our bills and I wanted to leave Elizabeth a few dollars. That wasn't the way it worked but we tried.

I really hoped that, somehow, I would be gone to Georgia only a day or two. Then I would be back. All would be the same. The way it was before.

I quit my job at the hotel the day before I got on the train. Everyone came by and told me goodbye. I thought I heard a few chuckles and someone saying, "Sucker."

My trip to the train station was the shortest five miles I ever drove. My wife and my aunt went with me. The train was to leave at 8 a.m. but we sat for three more long hours. Waiting. We sat and talked, with my aunt doing most of the talking. My aunt had raised me and she was concerned about me now.

Elizabeth and I were just holding hands, afraid to turn loose of each other. The train to Georgia was finally called. They would

not let my aunt walk beyond the gate with me. She had to say goodbye there.

Elizabeth and I walked on through the gate and down the platform to my coach. All the men around us were running around, yelling and making all kinds of noise. Some were drunk and didn't know what they were doing. We reached my coach. I held Elizabeth in my arms. She was so warm and soft. I told her that I would be back in a few days. As I kissed her goodbye on the platform, there were all kind of whistles and cat calls from fellows leaning out of the train windows and doors and standing around us. I stepped up on the train. It was so full of young men that I could hardly get on.

I stood on the bottom step of the coach as the train moved slowly out of the station. I could see my beautiful wife standing there, waving goodbye, with tears in her eyes. I could see that blond hair and the pretty pink dress suit that she was wearing for a long way down the track. Then white clouds swirled up from the steam engine and I could see her no more. I turned to climb into the coach and I couldn't keep the tears back or the lump out of my throat.

There were four men in every seat inside the coach, packed like sardines. Some were even sitting in the aisle. After about an hour's ride, the train seemed to slow. There were card games all over the coach. Many of the guys had liquor to drink and were getting pretty loud. The card and dice games were getting bigger. I was able to find me a seat.

As night came, everyone tried to make himself comfortable. It began to look like it was going to be a long way to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

Night on the crowded train was rough. Trips to the latrine were impossible to make because of the lines. We got so tired.

It began to get light outside. Everyone was trying to get some sleep except those in the card games that had been going on all night. Some players were so drunk they had passed out.

We were given box lunches during that day. At 9 that evening, we finally arrived in Fort Oglethorpe.

When the train stopped we were told to get into Army trucks which stood waiting for us as we got off the train. The truck ride to the camp took more than an hour, with a lot of unexplained stopping and waiting along the way. When we got to the camp we were told to unload and stand beside the trucks. An Army officer asked if we

were tired and if we would like something to eat. We were told to line up in single file and walk over to the mess hall.

We waited for half an hour. I hadn't noticed the cold very much until then. There was snow in spots on the ground. The line finally started moving into the mess hall. I got to the trays and picked one up, along with a plate and one spoon. That was all they had. I walked on down the line and the guy behind the counter dropped a piece of bologna on my plate and put a small scoop of cold mashed potatoes on top of it. I was so hungry that I made no complaint. I thought, If this is how the Army eats, I am going to find me some place else to go.

After our magnificent dinner, we picked up our belongings and walked to an area where there were tents on wood platforms, with eight cots in each tent. There was only one blanket on each cot. I knew this night would be worse than the night on the train.

It was cold but, by keeping the one blanket and all my clothes on, I was able to sleep part of the night. It was early, around 5 o'clock in the morning, when we were called to get out of bed. They told us to clean up and take a good shower because we would be taking a physical. Then we would be given a pass to go back home for a few days to get our personal lives in order. This was the best news yet. I would be going home. That was about all I could hear.

At breakfast, I toyed with the camp kitchen's powdered eggs, bologna and coffee and had a piece of their cold toast. There were very few complaints for we knew we would soon get the hell out of there.

The physical was something like the one back home. Only it was a little more like a real physical exam. We were asked about diseases that we might have had and what shots and vaccines we had received. The officers were very nice to us. They called us "gentlemen."

After the physical, we all went back to our tents. Names were called out and we came back outside and formed a line. We had our bags with us and set them down in front of us.

The officer said, "Gentlemen, the names called out will take two steps forward." My name was among those called out. The officer dismissed the others and about half of the original group of seventy-five men was left standing in line. His next words were, "Gentlemen, we want to welcome you to Fort Oglethorpe. We want your stay here to be as comfortable as possible. You will now be inducted into the Army, this day of December 5, 1942. Please, raise

your right hand and repeat the Pledge of Allegiance and the Army Oath after me."

After the pledge and the oath, he said, "Thank you. You are now in the Army."

The officer looked up and down the line of new recruits and smiled. "You gentlemen are soldiers now. Your country salutes you. If you have any further questions, your master sergeant will gladly answer them for you." He nodded and walked away.

The master sergeant waited until the officer had left the area. "You sons of bitches are in the Army now," he rasped. "So, pick up your damned bags. Shut your god damned mouths and listen. If I want you to talk, I will tell you to talk. Now, see if you can form your tails in a column of twos and march to the trucks."

The sergeant's voice and words were a shock to all of us.

But we were soon in the trucks and on our way to the train station.

I was on my way to Memphis and my beautiful wife.

The train left about 2 p.m. and would arrive back in Memphis about 8 the next morning. Everyone on the train was very quiet on the night run to Memphis. There was no drinking and very little card playing. Things had become very serious. No one wanted to talk.

We were all overjoyed when Memphis came in sight. When we arrived at Union Station, I thought it was the most beautiful place in the whole world. I put my hand on every column on the platform as I got off the train and walked down the platform. I got to a phone and called my angel. She had not left for the B-25 plant. "I'm on my way to pick you up," she said. The wait seemed like forever. When I saw her car coming, I rushed to meet it and started hugging and kissing her through the window. We were so happy to see each other that we hugged and kissed all the way home. I don't know why I didn't have a wreck. We had been away from each other for only five days. Now we were going to have five days together. We wanted it to last for a lifetime. These five days and nights together were the most precious thing that we had now. We couldn't waste one second of them. We existed only for each other. The rest of the world meant nothing to us.

We took long walks in the park, holding hands. We hurried home to love each other. Our world was beautiful.

Then the five days were over.

## A Goodbye Never to Forget

We had said goodbye a few short days ago in this same train station. I knew then that I would return to my wife, Elizabeth, in a few short days. Now, this goodbye was different. Like none other that I had ever experienced. Our thoughts and hearts had only been for each other, these past few days. Nothing else existed in the world. Only Elizabeth and I were real. Could the love of Romeo and Juliet have matched the love we felt for each other?

This time, the train station seemed vast, and echoing and somber. Young men in new uniforms were everywhere. They were holding hands with their girl friends, wives, and mothers. There were plenty of tears being lost.

Elizabeth and I sat quietly on the hard wooden bench, holding hands. Words just didn't seem to come. We could only look at each other and feel the warmth and closeness of our bodies. Elizabeth was so very beautiful with the long, golden blond hair flowing around her shoulders. The light blue dress suit she was wearing made her truly look like an angel. "How could I turn and walk away from her?" I was thinking.

The speaker system in the big train station was now calling out trains and track numbers. A chill ran through me with each announcement.

Then it came. They were calling my train and track number. I didn't want to let go of Elizabeth's hand. It was as though I would be safe and secure so long as I held her hand. I picked up my bag. The two of us slowly walked toward the train track gate, looking for the right number. We found the gate and walked up to it. I gave my travel papers to the officer waiting there. He looked at the paper and said, "This is as far as your girl friend can go. She is not allowed beyond this gate." I corrected him quickly, almost too loudly. "She is not my girl friend. She is my wife." The gate officer looked at the train conductor standing beside him. He then looked at Elizabeth and said, "You have a very pretty wife. Your wife may walk down the platform to your train coach but be careful." "Thank you very much," I said.

We slowly walked through the gate and down the concrete platform by the train. Soldiers in uniform, carrying bags, passing us by on each side. It seemed that I was taking my last walk to eternity. We were still holding hands so tightly that we felt like we



A goodbye never to forget . . .

were one person. Steam vapors were blowing and rising up from under the train coaches onto the platform.

Elizabeth and I stopped near the steps of the coach that I was to board. With the steam vapor cloud swirling around us, we stood looking at each other. I put the bag down on the platform. Our arms found their way around each other. Elizabeth was so soft and warm. We embraced and kissed. We wouldn't let go of each other. Her lips were so very soft and lovable. Our lips were together. We belonged together.

We could have stayed like this forever.

A loud voice behind us called out, "All aboard!"

I opened my eyes. The train was starting to move. I dropped my arms from around Elizabeth, picked up my bag and turned and jumped on the bottom step of my coach. The conductor wanted to close the gate. Elizabeth was still standing there, tears glistening in her eyes. I rushed into the the train coach and found a vacant seat by an open window. I leaned out as far as I could. Elizabeth was standing there on the platform. With the white cloud of vapor around her feet. The light blue suit she was wearing made her shoulder length golden blond hair more beautiful than ever.

The train jerked and moved out. It rolled faster. I could still see her standing there on the platform but then she began to disappear. It seemed as though she was floating away in the white cloud around her. I could see the glow and halo about her head and shoulders as she disappeared.

I felt as though she was disappearing forever, that I might never see her again. We had not spoken a word about when we would meet again. It was too much to think about or say. We just didn't want to talk about the unknowable future. We knew it was for the duration - whatever that meant.

There was such a quietness in the train coach as the train rolled on down the tracks. The only sound was the wailing of the engine's whistle and the *click clack* of the wheels. Real loneliness was beginning to set in. There was no chance of holding back the tears. I tried not to let anyone see me crying. As I looked around at the other men, I could see that I wasn't the only one with wet eyes.

Everything was dead serious now. We all realized this was the real thing.

Countryside scenes slipped by the train coach window. I was not aware of them. I could only think about the angel I had left standing on the platform at the train station. "When will I see her again?" I wondered. "After the duration."

The duration! What the hell was that?

This time, the train seemed to be rolling fast. No noisy card games this time. The coach was not nearly as crowded with young men as it had been on the first trip to Georgia. I guess the ones who missed the ride were the lucky ones; they must have been allowed to stay home with their loved ones.

There was a young man sitting in the seat next to me. We both tried to make small talk but it sounded like we had frogs in our throats.

The train arrived in Fort Oglethorpe about noon the next day. We were off the train and bouncing along in Army trucks before I realized it. This time, there was no waiting around. The trucks seemed to be in a hurry to get back to camp. The drivers were throwing us around in the back of the trucks like a load of balls.

At camp we jumped out and lined up in a single line with our bags. The officer in charge said, "Welcome back to Fort Oglethorpe." He turned us over, without ceremony, to a master sergeant.

"My God!" I thought. "It's the same sergeant we had on the first trip here."

"Okay, you bastards pick up your bags," he rasped. "This is the Army. See if you can learn to act like soldiers. Keep your mouth shut until I tell you to open it. Raise your right hand. Now, your right foot is under that hand. Okay, find your left foot. It is across from it. Now put your left foot forward and keep walking. We will call that 'marching.' Got it? Now start."

We marched to a row of platform canvas tents. It looked like the same place we had stayed before, but they all looked alike.

The next blast from the master sergeant was, "Keep your damn bags by the cot you want to sleep in until you can ship them home. The Army will give you what you need and all that you need. Hurry up, you bastards. Move!"

We hurried, stumbling over ourselves, trying to obey his commands. I said to myself, "I have never been talked to like this before. I wonder what would happen if I tried to knock the hell out of this guy?"

We put our bags down and got back in line as quickly as possible but not quickly enough to please the sergeant. He walked up to a big country-looking boy and said something to him, so quietly that the rest of us could not hear him. The country-boy doubled up a fist and took a swing at the sergeant. The sergeant ducked neatly and knocked the boy to the ground.

"Anybody else want to try that?" the sergeant roared.

He walked down the line of men as though nothing had happened. He pointed and said, "You. You. You. Fall out and line up. You bastards need your hair cut. We will see that you get it cut."

Thank goodness, I was not one of the men he pointed to. The man next to me announced, "I just got a haircut before I left home."

The sergeant heard him. He pointed his finger at him and rasped, "You! Fall out and line up with the other long hairs." I learned fast that I had better just keep my mouth shut.

The line I was in was ordered to march off, under a constant spray of complaints from the master sergeant. We ended up at a mess hall.

I really wasn't excited about eating cold mashed potatoes and bologna again. To my surprise, the meal consisted of roast beef, hot mashed potatoes and gravy, cabbage, iced tea that tasted suspiciously like coffee, and plenty of milk and bread. Well! This was really a change for the better from the last visit.

The men who had been sent to get their hair cut, came into the mess hall before we finished eating. Their heads were almost shaved. They didn't even look like the same men. Everyone acted as if nothing was wrong. When we finished eating, the sergeant marched us back to our tents and dismissed us for the night. I took a shower and returned to my tent and sat down on a cot.

The air was now getting colder. The sun was sinking and it was beginning to get dark. There were eight of us in the tent, sitting on a wood platform. We all seemed strange to each other. There was little conversation between us. I think we all looked like a bunch of homesick calves.

I was beginning to feel cold. I said, to the fellow on the next cot over, "Let's see if we can find anything to burn in this stove." There was a small square stove in the center of the tent.

We stepped outside and walked along the road. We soon ran across a large pile of wood. We loaded up our arms and came back to the tent. The other fellows began helping bring more wood and build a fire. The little stove finally did a fair job of warming the tent. This working together, getting firewood, got us all started talking to each other.

As darkness set in, we began to hear a bugle playing taps. We all stood up at attention. After it stopped, everyone sat down on their cot. Some crawled under the blankets with their clothes still on.

Quietness was beginning to set in. I was beginning to feel my first real case of homesickness. I crawled under my blankets. I felt so alone. I knew my wife would now be crawling in bed by herself. The radio beside her bed would be on and she would listen to a ballroom dance band a while. The music would be so soft and pretty. I reached for my angel. She wasn't there. The tears began to fill my eyes once more.

It was a miserable night. I don't know if I slept or not.

Someone was hollering in the dark, "Get up and get on your feet! Get up!"

I got up in the cold and walked to the latrine. Thank God, it was warmer in there. I cleaned up and came back to the tent. I made up my cot, went outside and joined a formation and marched to the mess hall. We had powdered eggs, bacon, toast and tea. Everything happened in order, one thing after another. After eating, we marched, somewhat clumsily, to a long building and formed into a single line at the door.

When I walked in, the guy behind the counter said, "What size shoe do you wear?"

I said, "Seven and a half 'A'."

He said, "Good. These should fit if you wear double thick socks."

Next came the pants. "I wear a twenty-four by thirty," I said.

What I got was twenty-eight by thirty-three. They gave me a cap that fell over my ears and a shirt with cuffs that passed below my finger tips.

I went back to the tent and tried on the uniform. I rolled up the pant legs and shirt sleeves, put on the shoes and two pair of socks, set the cap on my head. Boy, did I look like a sad soldier. I sat down on the cot and looked around at the other fellows. I thought, If I look half as funny as they do, I must really be a laugh. I laughed to keep from crying.

The sergeant was hollering at us, "Fall in. Single file." He looked at us lining up and he laughed in our face. I didn't think he knew how to laugh. He said, "You need some alterations. We're going to march over where they pin up uniforms."

We went to another long building and stood in line forever. When I got inside the door, a soldier started measuring me. He couldn't do anything with the pants so he gave me another pair that fit a little better. The same thing with the shirt. I thought, "If they had given me the correct size in the other building, this wouldn't be

necessary." I soon learned: this was the standard Army way of doing things.

The sergeant gave us a card. I gave the card to a soldier at the end of the building. He gave it to a soldier who was making dog tags. He stamped my name, rank and serial number on two matching pieces of metal tags. When we all came out of the building, we were beginning to look more like real soldiers.

The sergeant told us to put the pair of tags on a chain and put the chain around our necks. "It's like a dog wears," he rasped.

"Wear your dog tags until your neck turns green," he said. "Live with them, wash with them, eat and die with them around your neck. Without your dog tags, you are nobody. Remember the number stamped on it. That number is you. If you do not know your number, you are a nobody."

It looked like we were going to keep this sergeant guy with us forever. He was everywhere. Sometimes I thought they somehow had made two or three duplicates of him.

The next day, we were taught how to make up a cot in the Army style. We were taught how to run from place to place on the base, know our right foot from our left, and other such basics. Thank goodness, I had R.O.T.C. training under my belt and knew military drills. The daily routine remained the same, the next three days: sleep, eat, run, exercise and wait, ending with lonely nights and thinking about my angel.

On the fourth day, something new was added: written tests. It was the General Military Classification Test. It was given in another long building. While you took it, instructors talked to you, trying to interrupt your thoughts and confuse you. One of them told me, "Don't try to do too good on this test. If you make a good grade, they'll send you to the front lines."

This was far from the truth, I later found out. The test actually would have a great bearing on how far you might advance in the Army. The test took up a whole morning. When we finished, it was time for lunch and we marched to the mess hall. After lunch, we were marched to another long building.

The next building turned out to be a hospital. My medical records were checked. They gave me more shots. We were asked how many soft drinks we had in the past twenty-four hours. Of course, no soft drinks were available to us there.

Cold, lonely nights, busy days, hurry up and wait: that was the order of the day for the next ten days. There was no mail. We mailed our personal clothes home. I saved some of the paper I had

found to wrap my clothes in, and that night I used it to write a letter to Elizabeth. I would mail the letter when I found a place to mail it and some kind of envelope to put it in.

After the tenth day, we were each interviewed again. A staff sergeant with my records in front of him, began asking me questions.

"What did you do in civilian life?" he asked.

"I worked as a steam and refrigeration engineer," I said. "I was chief engineer at a big hotel in Memphis. I have a first class operating engineer's license."

"What does a steam engineer do?" he said.

I tried to explain but he interrupted me and said, "Did you do anything else?"

I said, "Yes. I have a pilot's license to fly single engine aircraft."

"Well," he said, "now we're getting somewhere. I have a few openings in the Air Force. They're asking us to ship them 200 men."

I said, "I'd like to get in the Air Force pilot training program, if possible."

The sergeant said, "I don't have a listing for pilot requests. My lists only has openings for air crews. I'll put you on that list. Maybe when you get to an Air Force base you can ask about pilot training. Your record and your IQ grades look pretty good to me. I'll put you down on the Air Force list. They'll do something for you."

He sounded confident.

The next day, I found the mail room and got some envelopes and writing paper. I mailed my letter to Elizabeth and told her the good news that I would be shipped out to the Air Force.

The eight soldiers in my tent didn't have a lot to say during the day time. They spent much of each night with tears in their eyes, as I had. I think we were all in a state of shock.

On the twelfth day, we were called out into formation. The names of ten soldiers - mine among them - were called out of the group of about seventy-five men.

"Get out your barracks bag and pack your clothes and be ready to ship out of here, right after lunch," rasped the master sergeant. "Move!"

Bouncing along in the back of an Army truck, headed for the train station, I was hoping that was the last I would ever see of that sergeant.

While the ten of us were waiting at the station, I looked at them and realized I didn't know the last name of any of the men. For the past twelve days, we had called each other by our first names only, or simply said, "Hi, soldier."

Only twelve days in the Army and there I was, getting on a train again, not sure of where I was going. I had no letters and no word from my wife or home. I wondered if the Army knew for sure where I was. Mail might never find me, or catch up with me.

There were two to each seat in the train coach, with pairs of seats facing each other. We were beginning to talk to each other because we had to sit looking each other in the face. We all were happy that we were going to the Air Force. The group I was with didn't seem to have as many trouble makers in it.

The officer in charge came through the coach and told us we were going to Keesler Army Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. The trip would take about three days. He told us to try to make ourselves as comfortable as possible because it was a long, hard trip. We would be traveling on some out back country train tracks.

At least, we now knew where we were going. After a few hours, I really began to know what a slow train was. We seemed to go about six inches an hour.

The trip took three full days, just like the officer said. Box lunches were passed out to each of us at meal times. Sandwiches and fruit, apple one time and orange the next. The further south we traveled, the warmer it felt in the coach. Everyone was becoming friendly. Homesickness was wearing off a little. I was wondering how one could have been in heaven one week and in hell the next. "Hell" was the only way I could describe the past twelve days at Fort Oglethorpe

When I looked out the coach windows, all I could see was mile after mile of pine trees. There were pine trees everywhere. You could even smell the pine trees along with the coal smoke from the steam engine that was pulling the train. Even though this was now the middle of December 1942, the weather was warm.

## The Strange Halo

I sat daydreaming in the seat next to a window, wondering what my angel was doing at that moment. Less than three months ago, on September 26, 1942, I was with her and we were getting

married. I had worked that day at the hotel until 2 p.m., then rushed home to get dressed.

While I was dressing in my best and my only suit, my aunt asked, "Robbie, what are you doing?"

I hadn't told her. "I'm getting married this afternoon," I said. "I'm going to marry Elizabeth."

We had set the date about a week before and this was the day. My aunt said, "Son, you have to have a marriage license and a preacher. You can't get married this quick."

I said, "Well, I'm going to try."

My aunt said maybe she could help. She made a phone call to a Baptist preacher in Marion, Arkansas, a friend of hers. She made arrangements for us to be wed at 6:30 that afternoon. We would have to get the license at the courthouse in Marion before 5 o'clock.

I called Elizabeth and said, "All the arrangements are made. I'm on my way over there to pick you up."

She said she would have to get dressed.

"I'm on my way," I said.

My aunt got a boarder who lived at the house to go with her in the car. I went to get Elizabeth in my car. My aunt picked up Elizabeth's mother. We were all to meet at the courthouse in Marion where I would get the license, then go to the church for the wedding.

I picked up Elizabeth. She was wearing a deep blue velvet suit. She was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. Her blond hair was beautiful, falling like spun gold over her shoulders. I held her hand all the way to the courthouse while driving the car across the river bridge with my one free hand. I kept thinking, "What a lucky guy I am. I love her so very much."

We arrived at the courthouse at 5 p.m. and I jumped out of the car and ran up the steps and inside. Mr. Carter, my aunt's boarder, ran in behind me. The clerk was about to leave. I said, "I need a marriage license."

"Well, son, I've closed the books for the day," he said. "Come back tomorrow."

"Please," I said. "We must have it today. I have made all the arrangements at the Baptist Church, here in Marion, at 6:30 this afternoon. Please."

"Do you have a witness?" the clerk asked. "Are you twenty-one years old?"

"I have a witness and I'll be twenty-one next month - on October 14," I said.

The clerk looked at me and said, "Well, at least, you have a witness."

He wrote out the license and asked for five dollars. "When the preacher signs it, you will be married," he said.

I gave him the money and thanked him. I only had twenty dollars left. I thought, putting my wallet back in my pocket, I sure hope the preacher doesn't want too much of that. I ran out and down the steps of the courthouse, license in hand, with Mr. Carter following me. I reached the car, hollering, "I got it, I got it!"

I got in the car with Elizabeth, kissed her hand and followed my aunt's car to the church.

We walked into the church chapel holding hands. I turned and looked at Elizabeth in that deep blue velvet suit dress with the small white flower on it. I could see the halo glow around her face and head. We met the preacher as we walked in. I wondered if the preacher could see the halo.

"I was expecting you," he said, "so I moved some flowers into the chapel for your wedding."

We stood by the flowers. The preacher performed the wedding. We said our marriage vows. We were pronounced man and wife, before man and God. We kissed and embraced each other in front of everybody. Elizabeth was a little embarrassed, kissing me in front of other people. She was still the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. I could feel the presence of God with us as we stood there.

I walked into the other room with the preacher. He filled out the license and Mr. Carter witnessed it.

The preacher turned to me and said, "The usual fee is five dollars." He hesitated, looking me in the eye, and said, "I felt the presence of God with us while I was performing this wedding. I could see a halo around your wife's head. I don't want a fee for this marriage. I know it was made in heaven."

I could not believe what I had heard, coming from a preacher. I had seen that halo several times before. I had a hard time holding back the tears as he held my hand a few seconds. I turned and went back to Elizabeth. Everyone there was hugging us. Elizabeth and I got back into our 1936 black Ford coupe and headed back across the bridge to Memphis.

On the way back, I told Elizabeth what the preacher had said. I couldn't keep from having a lump in my throat while telling her.

I drove across the river bridge, holding my angel's hand all the way. The peace and quiet feeling was the grandest feeling that I had ever experienced. I could only look at Elizabeth and say to myself, "This beautiful woman belongs to me and we are truly one."

I felt that God had his arms around both of us.

The train jerked and I came to my senses. It wasn't September 26 any more. It was December 16 and I was on a train, in the Army and going to the Air Force.

December 16. I thought, "Boy, Christmas will be here in nine more days. I have never been away from home on Christmas before."

The train whistle was blowing and the wheels were still singing their metallic song: Clickity, clack, clickity clack, on and on through the night. I got out my pencil and paper and started another letter to my wife.

I sure didn't want Elizabeth to forget me.

The train whistle was blowing as it pulled into the Biloxi train station at 7 p.m. on December, 18, 1942. The train wheels clacking slowed to a stop. A voice rattled through the coach, "All out." I soon found myself off the train and lining up alongside it. It sure felt good, not to be moving. The train ride had lasted three days. I looked down the line of men. I had no idea there had been so many soldiers with us. I knew we had picked up some extra coaches at different towns along the way here, but this looked like we had all the Army with us.

The officer in charge told my group to pick up our barracks bags and climb into the waiting truck.

It was a short and fast trip to Keesler Air Force Base. We passed rows and rows of barracks, and stopped in a large area with rows and rows of tents.

The air was different. You could smell the ocean and the pine trees. The evening was cool but not really cold. We had on our winter uniforms and it felt comfortable to me. The officer said pleasantly, "Fellows, this will be home for a while." The sergeant put us in groups of fours and assigned each group to a tent on a wooden platform. The sides of the tents were wire screen. Leaving our bags at our tent, we were shown to the bath house and given time to visit it and clean up a little bit. After about an hour, we formed a column of fours and marched to the mess hall. We had a

meal of steak, mashed potatoes, greens, peas, bread, pie, milk and coffee or tea. It was a far better meal and better prepared than anything we had at Fort Oglethorpe or those box lunches on the train. I began to think, Maybe things are going to get better. So far, the officers and sergeants treat us nice.

Another day passed at our new vacation resort. We even had two clean sheets, two fresh blankets and a pillow with a clean pillow case on it.

We were assigned a master sergeant. I wondered if this one was going to be like the one we left in Fort Oglethorpe. Then he spat out, "Okay, you bastards. You will be in basic training for the next few weeks. I don't have long to make a damned soldier out of you. If that is even possible." I thought to myself, "They must send these sergeants to some kind of special school to be mean and use that kind of language. They are all the same."

The routine for the next few days was to get up at 6 a.m., shower, clean up the area, make up your cot, store your clothes the Army way, exercise, have a free time for about an hour, march in formation, eat lunch and dinner, have some free time before bed time, turn in and, around 9 p.m., listen to some guy with a bugle playing taps on the camp's public address system.

This routine wasn't too bad. The weather had been good. Pretty moon in the sky at night. The moonlight brought back my loneliness for Elizabeth. I had received no mail from home since I had been in the Army. I hadn't seen a phone anywhere that I could use to call home. I knew that I didn't have the money to call, anyway. Maybe my mail would catch up with me if I stayed in one place long enough.

After the third day, I was called out with a small group after breakfast and moved into a wooden barracks. There was heat, showers and a row of cots on each side, by the walls, with a third row down the middle. The barracks had an upstairs and downstairs. The same layout was upstairs on the second floor. Things were getting better. The next morning we were awakened at 3:30. I was wondering, "Why so early? What's going on?" It seemed I had just crawled in bed.

I made up my bunk, rushed through my shower and shave. Everyone was trying to shave at the same time. I got into my fatigue uniform, with canteen and belt, and climbed into one of the Army trucks. It was still dark when the trucks started rolling.

"Now, what?" we asked each other as we bounced along.

The trucks drove out the main gate and down the highway for many miles. The convoy came to a pine forest, turned off onto a small country road through the pines, and followed it for several more miles. Pine trees and more pine trees. The trucks stopped, long after dark, and we all got off.

The only light in the woods came from truck head lights with lenses painted over partly with black paint for security reasons. We lined up by a field kitchen. I really couldn't see much of it in the dark except when, once in a while, someone would shine their flashlight a moment or two. I got out my mess kit and something was dumped in it. I stuck out my canteen cup and something was poured in it. Instinct told me to find some place to sit down. Most of us found a pine tree to sit beside, which wasn't hard to do. I sat down and leaned back against the tree. I started eating what I guessed was powdered eggs with some kind of meat bits in it. The stuff in the canteen cup was supposed to be coffee. It was so strong that it would skin your mouth. We were told to wash our gear.

There were some flashlights shining on a steaming can of soapy water. We passed by it, dunking our mess kit in the can, then into another can of hot rinse water. I folded up the mess kit and hung it on my belt. By now, the sun was beginning to rise, and the fog was thick throughout the forest. We got into formation and walked for miles. I don't believe anybody knew where we were going, not even the sergeant who was leading us. We would stop and rest about every hour, then start walking again. Lunch was a repeat of breakfast, except we could see what we were eating. They gave us a piece of bread with some kind of gravy and meat chips on it. We got a big orange and some coffee that nobody could drink.

We were given about a hour after lunch to rest and relieve ourselves in a ditch that had been dug. Then, in a little open space in the trees, we were put through different marching formation commands. I was beginning to believe the Air Force must walk wherever they went, instead of flying.

It was late in the evening before we got back in the trucks to return to the base. When the trucks got back to the barracks, we were dismissed and everyone headed for his bunk. Every muscle in my body was an ache. I took my shoes and socks off. Blisters were rising on both of my feet. Before I knew it, we were called out in a formation and marched to the mess hall. Every step was misery.

The next morning, it was the same thing over again, starting at 3:30 a.m. I was beginning to believe that we were just going to

learn how to walk through the woods and do calisthenics in the open places.

Two days before Christmas, we were allowed to sleep until 5 a.m. I thought, "Someone forgot to wake us up, or the sergeant overslept." We were told that we had the day off. I went to the post exchange early to try to find something that I could send to my wife for Christmas. It couldn't cost more than five dollars for that was about all I had. I didn't know when this Army would ever pay me. I found a pretty pillow with Keesler Air Force Base printed on it, with a picture of an airplane. It was in a box and ready to mail so I bought it, put a note in it and mailed it to my wife. I hoped that she would understand that was all I could send her this Christmas.

Back at the barracks, I sat down and wrote my angel a long letter and added the few pages to a letter that I had already written but had not been able to mail.

I was beginning to feel that old lonely, depressed feeling again. My feet were hurting. My back and every muscle in my body was aching. I didn't have a dime for Christmas money.

"It can't get much worse," I thought.

## Christmas At The Resort

It got much worse.

When I looked at the bulletin board, I saw my name on a list for kitchen duty on Christmas Eve - from 2 p.m. to midnight.

On Christmas Eve, I was called out into a formation of twenty men and marched to the mess hall. We were turned over to the mess sergeant and the first job he gave me was peeling potatoes. I had never seen such a mountain of potatoes. I said, "I thought you peeled this many potatoes with a machine. That's what we did at the hotel I worked for in Memphis." "Oh, is that so?" asked the mess sergeant. I found out real quick that I was the potato peeling machine at this air base. For two and a half hours, I sat peeling potatoes. Ever so often, the mess sergeant would come by and measure the thickness of my potato peelings. At 4:30 p.m. I was told to set up the chow line and serve food to soldiers coming through. The mess sergeant made a big point of the fact that I had once worked in a hotel.

Hours passed. Still the hungry soldiers came. I began to think that soldiers would never stop coming through the line. We

were about to run out of food. The line had to be stopped and the men sent to another mess hall for food. We had served until 9:30 p.m. Now the clean up started. The mess sergeant told me to clean up the food line and then go to the dish washing area and wash dishes.

There was a dish washing machine with more dirty dishes around it than the machine could possibly wash in a year. I started putting dishes through it, one basket full after another. About 11:30 p.m., it happened. The water supply pipe to the washer blew apart. Water sprayed everywhere, flooding the dish washing room and pouring out into the mess hall.

I looked at the swirling water and just sat down on the floor in it. I sat there thinking, "Boy, this is some Christmas Eve." Lumps came up into my throat. This was the first Christmas I had been away from home. Another soldier working with me ran out, looking for the mess sergeant. I must have sat in the water twenty minutes before the soldier got back with the mess sergeant.

In another few minutes, it was going to be Christmas morning but this sergeant didn't look anything like Santa Claus to me. The sergeant began screaming and looking around. He had no idea where to turn off the water.

I said, "For god's sake, sergeant, get me a pair of pliers. Even a wrench of some kind. I'll fix the damned thing." The sergeant came back with a pair of pliers and a pipe wrench. I said, "Don't worry about it. I'm a hotel engineer. I'll stop the water."

After a few minutes, luck was with me and I was able to put the packing nut back together. The water stopped coming from the pipe. I said, "Sergeant, this is temporary. It won't hold forever, but it is okay for now."

I sat back down on the floor in the water. The sergeant said, "Get up soldier. What's your name?" I stood up and quickly said, "Robinson, John H. Serial number 34496440."

That was the way I had been told to do it. I was even proud of myself for remembering my serial number. The sergeant said, "Since you stopped the water, I'm going to let you take off."

This was some Christmas present, I thought. I was supposed to get off at midnight anyway. However, the other men were kept in the kitchen until after 2 a.m. I walked back to the barracks, soaking wet. It was after 1 a.m. when I crawled into the sack. I lay there thinking about my wife and wishing someone would say Merry Christmas to me. The other men in the barracks

were asleep. I wanted to go to sleep but I lay there with my eyes open and tears running down my cheeks.

The kitchen police work lasted for another five days. I was so worn out that I could no longer feel any aches.

On New Year's Day, the written aptitude tests started. That afternoon, our financial records were checked and put in order. I signed up to send my wife a fifty dollar allotment check each month. I would receive twenty-one dollars a month on the first of each month, beginning January 5. This was a private's pay. The next few days were spent completing the written tests. Aircraft mechanic test, radio operator test, armor gunnery test, meteorology test, general aptitude test, psychoanalysis test. It didn't look like the tests were ever going to stop.

We were told that within the next five days we would be told our grades, and what they would do with us.

Meanwhile, they sent us back to the pine forest. We were marching and drilling and learning how to hit a target with a rifle bullet. We would put a pack on our backs and march and run down the dirt roads for miles, going nowhere. There were pine trees where we started and pine trees where we stopped.

My drill instructor made all the other drill instructors look like angels. He would drop a rifle on your foot and blame you for not holding it.

I crawled in sand until my legs and arms were raw. I wasn't sure that I would ever see combat; this guy was going to kill me, here among these Mississippi pine trees. In the late evening, I went to the mail room. No letters from home. It was now after Christmas. I wondered if my wife had ever received her Christmas. Did she get any of the letters I mailed? I had sent her my address. I really didn't know anything. The world outside our camp seemed unreal.

Early one morning, while standing in line for roll call, the sergeant said he wanted ten mechanically minded men. He went down the line saying, "You. You. You." I was one of the "you's." Back to the pine forest we went. Somewhere, near the back bay area, we discovered the sergeant wanted us to clean out the woods. There was an Army Caterpillar tractor, with tracks and a blade, standing in a little clearing. The sergeant asked for volunteers to drive the tractor. No one stepped forward.

"We can always cut down the trees and clear the area - by hand," he said grimly.

I thought to myself, "I don't want to chop trees and I sure don't want to dig them out by hand."

"Sergeant, I'll give it a try, if everyone will stay back from it." The sergeant motioned me to climb aboard. "You guys get back," I said.

I got on the monster and then discovered it didn't have a steering wheel. It only had four levers - forward, reverse and brakes. I could use them to start and stop, maybe turn around if I handled it right. After I found out how to start the monster, I felt pretty good. I turned the key, pushed the button with all levers forward, and the thing started. It sounded like an elephant roaring. Everyone thought I knew what I was doing. I recognized the throttle. I found one lever that made it go forward and one that made it go backward. I soon found out how to use the blade, how to make it go up and down and tilt. I asked God to help me. So I was ready.

The sergeant said, "Push all those small trees down." So I set the levers, pushed the throttle and with a jerk the huge Cat went forward with its heavy cutting blade in place.

I hit the trees with a bang and down they went with the Cat. crawling all over them, and me hanging on. I just hoped I could stop this thing before I got to the back bay water. I made it turn. I pushed down another row of trees. Everyone thought I really knew what I was doing. I soon had cleaned out a bigger place than the sergeant wanted. "You've done enough," he yelled. "Stop it. Get off that thing."

I looked around. Boy! I had knocked down all the trees and piled them up. Cat tracks were everywhere - going across, back and forth, up and down. There was no stopping this thing. I had destroyed the whole area. All they needed to win this war is enough of these things, I thought.

We got back to the base, late for supper, but the mess hall was still open. They gave us the rest of the night as free time. I was still shaking from the encounter with that yellow monster. I sat down on the bunk and wrote to my wife about it.

The next day was free time. I was finding my way around. I now knew where to find the mail room, the post exchange, the mess hall and the commanding officer's office. That was pretty good for a new soldier.

At mail call I received five letters and a package, all from my wife! Some of the letters had been to Fort Oglethorpe and were just now catching up with me.

I was the happiest soldier in Biloxi, jumping up and down and waving my letters.

## Letters From Home

I ran as fast as I could back to the barracks. I sat on the end of the bunk and opened the letters from my angel. She had written to me every day! She had missed me just as I had missed her.

My wife was now working on the evening shift at the aircraft factory, building wings for the B-25. Her Christmas had been lonely. She had visited her family and my family during the holidays. The old car was giving her trouble, and the tires on it were thin. Everything was going okay at home but the hot water tank was leaking. She had not been able to get anyone to fix it. She said she had just turned it off and was doing without it. She said in each letter that she had missed me so very much and dreamed about me each night. In her dreams she felt that I was there beside her.

My letters were getting there and would arrive in bunches. They would skip a few days and then arrive again. The pillow case had arrived a few days after Christmas, and she was so proud of it, and loved it. She slept beside it.

I opened the package that I got from her. In it was a man's gold wedding ring. I thought it was beautiful. I put it on. It was a little big but I tried to wear it anyway. I could see Elizabeth when I looked at the ring.

I remembered when I gave Elizabeth her engagement ring. Elizabeth had slipped the little diamond ring on and said, "I will wear it but I will not accept it as an engagement ring now." I said, "You better because I have bought the wedding ring, too." She said, "Well, we will see." The next person she saw, Elizabeth told them, "Look at the engagement ring Harold gave me. We are going to get married, but we haven't set the date, yet." I knew she wanted the ring and loved me. As I did her. I loved her so very much.

I read the letters over and over. I kept one in my pocket, along with her picture, and put the rest in my foot locker for safe keeping.

That evening, we got into formation on the drill grounds, in front of a small table. The sergeant told us the pay master had arrived and we would be paid. "When your name is called," he said, "give the pay master your name, rank and serial number."

I was handed some money. I signed the book and stepped aside. A full twenty-one dollars. That was all I had. My money had run out two weeks before when I bought the pillow for Elizabeth.

Well, I had lived without money most of my life. It didn't make too much difference. I really didn't know what I would do with the money. I thought, "Maybe I had better send some of it home to Elizabeth." Later that evening, I went to the post exchange and looked at everything they had. I ended up buying myself a Coca Cola and some good razor blades. I had spent twenty-five cents and was almost afraid to spend that much. I walked back to the barracks and lay on the bunk. There were so many soldiers everywhere that your bunk was the only place where you felt you could get away from everything.

I still had not met anyone I felt comfortable around. A guy from New York bunked on one side of me, and a boy from Arkansas on the other side. The New Yorker was still in a state of shock and had nothing to say. The Arkansas boy's name was David and he was beginning to talk and try to be friendly. So far, we had been so dead tired, cleaning the barracks, doing kitchen work, cleaning the latrine, or marching in the drill field or down in the pine woods, there was no desire left to talk to each other. We'd just say, "Hi." Home sickness was still in everyone's mind.

We were beginning to smell pretty bad. I had two pair of fatigues, or work clothes, and both of them were getting pretty filthy. I had washed my socks and underwear and one pair of my fatigues. They were dirty again. The sergeant commented in words that you could quickly understand that clean fatigues would be worn by everyone at the next morning's formation. Or else.

The sergeant who took us out to push down the trees came back again. I knew another work detail was coming. He started saying, "You. You. You." I was one of the "you's" again. The sergeant recognized me as his Cat driver. "I believe we have a good earth moving job for you today," he said. I thought, "I guess they are beginning to appreciate me a little." I found myself picking up a shovel. We dug out a sand path so that concrete could be poured for a sidewalk. It was to be five feet wide and I couldn't see the end of it, or where it was going.

I was rapidly shovelling sand and throwing it aside when I looked at everyone else. Their shovels had very small loads of sand on them. I said to myself, "Slow down and do like everyone else is doing because we could be pitching sand a long time." The sand

loads got lighter and lighter on the end of my shovel. The next lesson I had to learn was how to lean on the handle of my shovel, but still look like I was working.

I was beginning to get to know the fellows working beside me. I learned how to start a conversation with another soldier by knowing anything he wanted to talk about. It sure beat shovelling sand in the hot sun.

The next lesson I learned was: Always be working when the sergeant walks by. By noon, we had only made a path of about one hundred feet, and there was more than twenty of us in the work detail. My muscle aches and pains were now slowly going away.

After the few days on the work detail, someone decided we were in need of visiting the obstacle course. It started out to be a little fun but it soon was too much.

Running, climbing, crawling under barbed wire, guns shooting, bullets whizzing just over your head above the wire, hopping over old tires, swinging on ropes, and running with a loaded back pack, canteen, mess kit and gas mask hanging on you. Then there was something new added - walking through gas with a gas mask on - then with the gas mask off.

The gas had the sweet smell of hay just cut. Then came the choking and tears. If you rubbed your eyes, it just got worse. The sergeant thought it was funny and he really enjoyed that part of our training. He gave lectures on all the different gases and how to protect yourselves from them.

After he tired of the gas drill, we were introduced to a new way to kill ourselves. We were given a special showing at the picture show. The sergeant called it a "health film." It was all about people with venereal disease. The pictures were worse than anything that I ever thought could happen to you in war. I knew there would never be any trouble about us ever getting venereal diseases - because we were never going to see a live woman again. We were told what a pro station was and what it was for. They filled in all the details and had films on how it was done.

After seeing the health films, it really made you think about the real price of sex with the wrong woman.

I kept wondering if as many women had this kind of stuff as they said.

If so, then why wasn't everybody dead?

## The Ocean and the Biloxi Blues

Inspection became the order of the day. Our clothes were checked for cleanliness and serial number markings. Your serial number had to be on everything you had. After the inspection, we were told we would have a laundry service once a week. There would be a small charge deducted from our paycheck, even if we did not use the service. We were told that we would have to keep our clothes clean.

I continued to write Elizabeth letters every night and get them mailed at least twice a week. Her letters were slow in getting here. To write to her and tell her what I was thinking, helped me to make it to the next day. To get a letter from her was like a new start on life.

The next Saturday, we were allowed to sleep until 6 a.m. We went to the mess hall and when we returned we fell out in a formation. We were told that we could have a pass for two days to go into town. It would start on Saturday noon and last until 8 p.m. Sunday. It was now the last of January. I hadn't seen anything that didn't have a uniform on it in such a long time. I had almost forgotten what a female form looked like, or if there were any civilians left out there.

David, the fellow from Arkansas who bunked next to me, and I picked up our pass from the commanding officer's office. We had very little money between us and didn't really know just what we would do in town. At least we could go see the ocean and the beach. We had been told the beach was near.

David and I got dressed. We thought we really looked like soldiers. We even cut each other's hair. We approached the gate and both of us acted like we were afraid to go through it. The military police looked us over and looked at our pass. We walked through the gate and out into the street. Everyone was walking in the street. Soldiers were everywhere. Coming and going.

There were as many soldiers coming and going as there were on the base. The houses along the street had been turned into little shops. We walked on in the direction of downtown Biloxi. Just walking together, talking about being out of camp. We were more like birds out of a cage. We walked over a train track and recognized it as being the track that we had ridden into Biloxi. After another block, we thought maybe we were on the main drag.

Biloxi was a small town. There were no autos on the streets. Only soldiers and more soldiers.

We had not seen a civilian, not one female. I saw some telephones. I thought I would call my wife but the phones were all in use. Soldiers were lined up all around them. It would be hours before I would get one. We kept on walking. Shops were more plentiful on each side of the street. Military police were in every block. Most of the stuff in the shops was souvenirs of Biloxi and Keesler Field. We finally saw some women clerks in some of the stores. Most of them were old women. They would hardly speak to you.

We stopped at a cleaning shop to get our pants pressed for twenty-five cents. There were little stalls where you could take off your pants and give them to the lady. They would press your pants while you waited. I got my pants back, and started putting them on. I noticed at my watch pocket there was the print of my wedding band. I had put it there because it was a little big to wear on my finger. The ring wasn't there. I asked the lady to see if the presser had the ring and, if so, I would like it back.

She came back and said there was no ring. I told her, "You can see where the press had closed on it." She just stared at me. David and I walked out after paying. There was no point in arguing. They had taken the ring and I would never get it back.

We continued walking down the street. David, said, "I wouldn't take that. They just stole your gold wedding ring." "Well! What can we do about it?" I said. "The ring is just gone."

The first military police that we saw, David walked up to them and turned to me, waiting. I told them the story and showed them the ring circle on my pants pocket. They asked us to walk back to the shop with them. They would see what they could do. We passed 2 more military police sitting in a jeep and they came with us, too. Everyone on the street was watching us, wondering what was going on. The military police went into the shop. They told us to stand outside of the door on the sidewalk. In a few minutes, one of the military police came out with the ring in his hand and asked, "Is this the ring?" I had been sure that I would never see it again. I said, "Look and see if it has the initials JHR on the inside of it." There it was JHR. I asked, "How did you get the ring?" The military policeman replied, "We told them they were out of business if they didn't come up with the ring. The shop would be off limits to soldiers."

He gave me the ring. I thanked him and we walked on down the street, talking about the military police. I was happier than ever about getting my ring back.

I thought maybe I could find a shop that could make it the right size for me. I put the ring on my finger and kept it there. We walked through town but couldn't find a shop that could fix the ring.

We walked down by the ocean, down by the lighthouse and toward Gulfport, Mississippi. We sat on the sea wall. There really wasn't very much of a beach. The ocean came up almost to the sea wall. Along some parts of the sea wall, there were all kinds of small shacks between it and the ocean. Soldiers were everywhere. On the other side of the street, there were bars, restaurants, and a few large hotels. Every once in a while, we would see a soldier with a nice looking girl. We never saw a girl by herself. She was always with a soldier. It was good to see a girl in a dress. It made you feel like you were back in the real world again.

It was getting late. Darkness came in off the ocean. David suggested we go back to camp and eat in the mess hall before they closed. This sounded like a good idea. I wanted to keep my money to buy my wife something and send to her. We had walked a good distance from Biloxi to Gulfport on the ocean road. Now, we had to walk back.

## The Gold Necklace

On the way back to camp, while walking down the ocean highway, David stopped a taxi. He asked the driver how much he wanted to take us back to the base. The cab driver said, "Five dollars." I said, "Not on your life. We will keep on walking. I don't have any more muscles to get sore, anyway."

We soon got to the famous Biloxi lighthouse. We turned away from the ocean, and were soon back at the base. We walked through the gate with a slight feeling that we were losing our freedom. We both went straight to the mess hall and then to our barracks. I sat down on the bunk and started writing to Elizabeth about the day's adventure, and the great city of Biloxi.

The next morning, we were up early. David and I took off again for town. We went through the gate this time with a little

more confidence. We agreed that we would finish our walk to Gulfport today. It was early Sunday morning and the ocean was very pretty. As we walked down the ocean road we passed a church. There were a few very pretty young ladies going into church and were all dressed up. It was nice to see a pretty girl in a dress again. We first thought we would go to church, then David said that we had better keep on walking if we were going to Gulfport for it was a long way.

We would stop along the ocean by the big oak trees and rest, once in a while. The trees were growing almost to the edge of the ocean. There was long moss hanging from them, making the trees look very pretty. The wind was very pleasant. I told myself, "Some day, my wife and I will walk along here." I could imagine us walking together on the edge of the ocean.

We finally reached Gulfport. As we entered the downtown area, there were just as many soldiers as in Biloxi. There was very little room on the streets to walk. Gulfport was a little larger town than Biloxi. There were sailors in the crowds walking down the street but the soldiers had them outnumbered.

I passed a jewelry store and told David, "Let's stop and ask about my ring. Maybe I can get it fixed." There was a man in the store. As we went in, he said, "Closed on Sundays." He said we could look around if we wanted to, that he had some work to do for a while and we could be there.

I asked if he ever fixed rings and made them smaller. He said, "That's what I'm doing now." I showed him my ring. He said he could make it smaller in a few minutes. It would cost me five dollars. "I usually charge more but I will do it for you for that," he said. He sat down at a work bench, cut my gold wedding ring and put it back together, then polished it while we stood there watching him. It only took him about fifteen minutes to do the complete job. The ring fit and looked very pretty. I put the ring on my finger and it has been there ever since.

I paid and thanked him for doing it so quickly for me. I said, "You are the nicest person we've run into here on the Gulf Coast." While I was looking around the jewelry shop, I saw a little gold chain necklace that I wanted to send to Elizabeth. The shop keeper said that I could have it for ten dollars. I told him okay and he put it in a box so I could mail it. I thanked him again for he seemed to be so very nice to us.

"I have a son in the Army," he said.

My money was now getting very short and I knew that I had better not spend any more. We continued to walk around Gulfport for a while. I thought, "We had better start back to Biloxi." We learned that we had walked more than fifteen miles to get there, and we would have to walk that far back. We passed a taxi stand and asked what they wanted to go to Biloxi. One of the cab drivers said, "Twenty-five dollars." We thought he was crazy. We started on our way down the highway when we saw a public bus pass us by. After a while, we saw another bus coming. We tried to stop it. The bus passed us a little ways and then stopped. We ran to it. As we got on, we asked how much it cost to ride to Biloxi. The driver said fifty cents. I didn't have much money but Biloxi was a long way so I gave him the money and so did David. To ride was worth it, even though we had to stand up on the bus.

The bus let us off in front of a large hotel, not far from the Biloxi lighthouse. We walked over by the hotel and went in the lobby. The place was full of officers. It made us feel like we were in the wrong place. We could hear music coming from a large room. It sounded like everyone was dancing and having fun.

We walked out of the hotel and across the street and sat down on the sea wall, watching the ocean. It was very pretty, even though the waves were small.

The sun was going down and the sunset was beautiful. David and I began to talk about what we did before we got into the Army. David had been raised on a small farm in Arkansas, near Hot Springs.

I said, "David, you see that big hotel over there? Well, I was the chief engineer of a hotel in Memphis as big as that one. You may not believe it, but I was the youngest licensed operating steam and refrigeration engineer in Memphis."

When I heard all the people in the Biloxi hotel room, where the music was coming from, I couldn't help thinking about an incident that happened at my hotel in Memphis. I started telling David my story.

"The hotel decided to get into the ballroom business in a big way," I said. "We built a new roof garden, and reworked our old ballroom. The hotel was competing with another large hotel for the ballroom trade. We were trying to be the best. They opened the ballroom with a new name. They called it the Balinese Room and it was very pretty, even if I did build it. It was one of the first uses of fluorescent lighting for accent lighting. It really was a very pretty

room but it was also a perfect fire trap. It was built of combustible materials and had a lot of open wiring.

"One Saturday evening, at a tea dance, they had a big name band playing for dancing. The leader of the band was Vaughn Monroe. All the employees of the hotel had to take a cut in pay for a month to help pay Vaughn Monroe's salary. He was a very big attraction and the ballroom was filled beyond its normal capacity that evening.

"The air conditioning coil that supplied refrigeration to the intake air for the room started leaking. We refrigerated with ammonia and the leaking ammonia was beginning to smell in the ballroom. I told the manager of the hotel he had better get the people out of the ballroom. I said, 'A great many of the people are drinking and are about drunk.' The manager said to me, 'I am not going to get them out now. We would have to give them their money back. If you want to keep your job, you will stop the ammonia leak and keep the place cool.'

"With the help of God, I put a piece of pipe against the coil leak and stuck the other end outside of the coil box into the outside atmosphere. With some putty around the end of the pipe next to the leak, I was able to make most of the ammonia vent outside the building. The amount that was getting into the room was giving the room a light smell of some kind of disinfectant. The band played on. People kept on dancing, drinking and making love. They never paid much attention to the smell.

"The manager went up to the bandstand microphone and told everyone that a bottle of ammonia cleaning water was spilled and they would smell it for awhile. I held my fingers crossed and sat there watching the leak all evening.

"When the ballroom finally closed, I shut the coil down and welded the leak. I kept thinking about what a disaster it could have been."

David said, "I will never go back into a hotel again. I bet they all are like that."

Sitting there, watching the sun go down, David and I were feeling a little homesick. We continued to watch the sun sink into the ocean.

Neither of us had anything to eat since breakfast. "We had better get back to the base," David said. As we walked on the base, we stopped and got a cold soda. I think we were both thinking about home for we sure didn't talk very much.

After we ate, we went back to the barracks. Sitting on the cots, we began to talk about our day, especially about all the girls we had seen going into church that morning. I thought I had accomplished a lot. I had my wedding ring fixed and I bought Elizabeth a present. I got the necklace out of my pocket and took it to the mail room and mailed it to her. I was beginning to think this was the best day that I had spent in the Army. I went to sleep that night with Elizabeth on my mind, wondering if she would like the necklace.

The next day, some of us were told to pack our things and to move down the road to another barracks area and a new squadron. I cleaned up my barracks area, put my two barracks bags on my shoulders and took off to the new squadron area. My new barracks was about the same as the one I had just left but it had fewer men in it and the bunks were further apart.

"It'll be nice to have a little more room," I thought, "but I will miss having David to talk with." I was beginning to understand that you were never going to be around anybody for a very long time in the Army.

I was happy that a change was taking place. It was something different to do.

The next morning, when I was called out into formation, I was told why I was there. I had made high grades on all the written exams and could be assigned to any one of the technical schools. They needed more aircraft mechanics at this time, so I would go to an aircraft mechanic school for the next few months. "Maybe this means no more basic training and kitchen police," I thought.

In the new barracks, I had a foot locker and a wall locker to hang my clothes in. This was a big improvement. I was given the third cot on the left, near the front door. I thought this was going to be real uptown living. A very nice young Mexican soldier was in the bunk next to me. On the other side of me was a fellow from Alabama.

We began to talk to each other and we hit it off real well. This was going to be the first real friendship since I had been in the Army.

You really didn't want to get to know anybody, at first. Maybe it was just being homesick and not knowing what was to come next. For the first time, I knew what I would be doing for the next several days and weeks. I was going to an aircraft mechanic school.

I began to receive letters from home every few days. I wrote my wife every night.

During the first few days of school, we were told what to expect from the instructors, and what they would expect of us.

The classrooms were well equipped and the instructors had an exact routine to follow for each subject they taught. Everything was straight and forward. There was no fooling around allowed. Home work was given for every night.

The first course was to be Aircraft Mechanic Tools and Fundamentals, and would be fifty-six hours long. It would be formal study and application.

The routine was: get up at 5 a.m., clean up, answer roll call, march to the mess hall, return to the barracks, pick up your school books and lessons for the day, march to school, study for eight hours, return to the barracks, clean up, march to the mess hall for supper, return to the barracks and study for the next day. I would walk to the mail room and mail my letter to Elizabeth and pick up my mail. I would read my mail, then walk to the post exchange and look around, then come back to the barracks and be in bed by 9 o'clock. Lights out at 10 p.m. This routine really made the time pass fast.

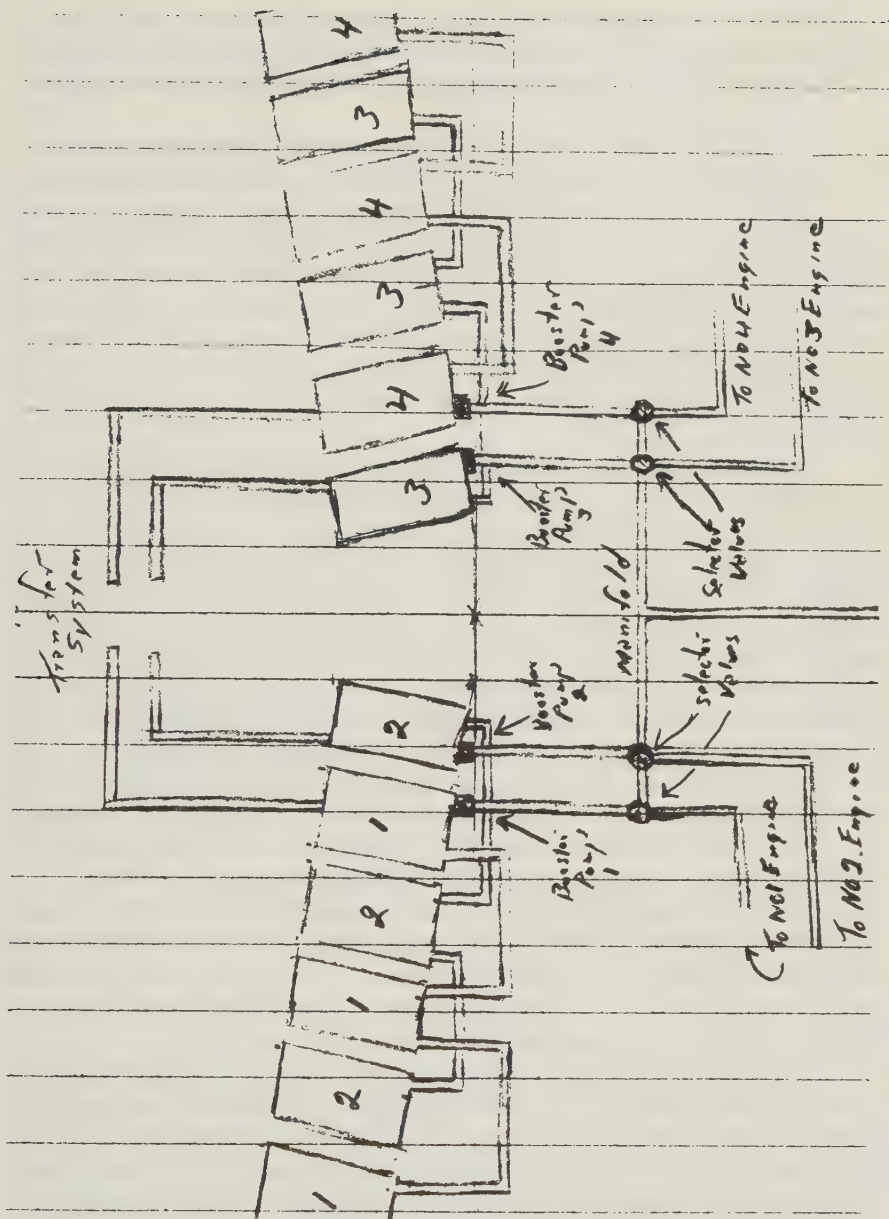
The fundamentals of mechanics were very easy for me, because of my background in practical engineering and my experience as a steam and refrigeration engineer.

Nick, the Mexican fellow, was becoming a real close friend. He was a very bright student and was eager to learn as much as he could. He became a good study partner. I really enjoyed helping him and it helped me study and learn, too. Every night, we would study together and the time would pass. Tom, the fellow from Alabama, would join us sometimes and we got a good study class going. We would finish our work book every night.

Our day off, once a week, seemed to pass very slowly. I didn't look forward to it much.

The next course was Aircraft Structures. Then came one titled Hydraulics. Each course was taught in a different building and with a different instructor. Most instructors knew their subject very well and made every effort to help us learn. Most had been instructors for some time.

We were graded on the way we did the lesson workbook, attention paid to instructor and actual hands-on work. There were mock ups of equipment to work on. Most everyone was interested in what they were being taught, and what they were doing. There



A class notebook sketch of bomber fuel lines . . .

were one or two in each class who were not interested, and would goof off if they could. Most of the other students would stay away from them and let them go their own way. There were always a few misfits and goof offs.

The next course was titled Engines. We took apart some of the engine mock ups. They had been taken apart so many times that the bolt threads were gone. There were all kinds of aircraft engines to work on. The final step in the engine course was to check out a good radial engine and put it in a test stand, hook up fuel to it and make it run. If the class got the engine to run, then the class would be the tops. A lot of classes didn't get their engine to run. We made our engine run the first try. After finishing Engine school, things were getting pretty routine. My class was doing pretty good. We felt good about ourselves.

Next class was Electrical Systems. There were all kinds of electrical problems to solve. Some were impossible to solve the Army way. I wired the three-way bomb bay switches on the mock up, and made it work. This gave me some Brownie points with the instructor. I was asked to look at a motor generator set and tell them which end was the motor end. I told them that, on low voltage equipment, the primary side had to be the biggest wire. There had to be more power input than output. The instructor wanted me to show him. The motor side wouldn't run when I put power to it. I told the instructor the motor had an open field and wouldn't run. The instructor put power on the small end and motorized the generator and the unit turned. He believed that was the drive end of the unit. I just let him believe it. There was no way a private was going to convince a sergeant that the private was right.

There were electric prints to learn to read the Army's way. Sheet after sheet of them. There were large bundles of wiring to trace and tie down in an aircraft frame. Nick, the Mexican, was really good at tracing wires, and seemed to have a real nose for finding trouble and correcting it.

We were in a real routine of getting our workbooks finished at night in the barracks. Several others had joined our study group. It just seemed to make study easy when we were all together. At the other end of the barracks, a few would gather and play cards, and get loud sometimes but the corporal of the barracks would stop it.

The corporal wasn't really a hard guy to get along with, as long as his barracks didn't get a demerit. He made everyone keep the place in good shape. We were always ready for an inspection.

It rained some, every day. It didn't bother us much for we were in class most of the time. I felt sorry for those guys who were living in tent city. "They must be catching hell in all of this rain," I thought.

The next course was Fuel Systems. They had all kinds of fuel tanks, carburetors, diaphragms, floats, injection systems, bullet proof fuel tanks, metal tanks, rubber tanks.

It was hard to believe there was so many different fuel tanks in a B-24 wing. We had to take a bullet proof tank out of a wing section and put it back in. We never did get the thing back in right. It would just take experience to do it properly. "With all these wing tanks in a B-24, it must be a bomb itself with so much fuel," I thought. "I wonder if it ever bothers the guys who fly in them all the time."

Eventually, I would know the answer to that question.

We were now about half way through Aircraft Mechanic School. I was given another pass to go to town for two days. I tried to find some way to go to Memphis to see my wife, but the pass was limited to within twenty-five miles of Biloxi, so that stopped that.

I picked up my pass and three of us took off for the great city of Biloxi. There were still as many soldiers in town as there were on the base. There was one big difference, however. Once in a while you saw a female form along the ocean, a skirt instead of a pair of khaki pants. We knew there was no way to meet and talk to a female, so we just didn't worry about it. We looked but kept on walking.

We enjoyed sitting on the sea wall and looking out across the ocean. Once in a while, a boat inched by on the horizon. We watched the cars and buses going up and down the ocean front highway.

The little things seemed to count more, and seemed a lot more interesting, when the freedom of normal civilian life was gone. Just to walk outside of the Army post. To feel that someone is not looking over your shoulder every minute. To feel the breeze from the ocean in your face. To joke and laugh and talk about home. Just all the little things in life. To throw a seashell in the ocean, wishing that your loved one was there with you, to enjoy the ocean with you. The day was spent around the ocean, just daydreaming.

Back to camp that evening and back to the ocean the next day. The second day passed as fast as the first day.

The next morning, it was time to go back to school. This time we found ourselves studying Instruments. There were instruments of all kinds. There were remote instruments, electrical transmission instruments, pneumatic instruments, gyros, all types of engine instruments and flight instruments.

Classes were long and tiring. There weren't enough instructions to do a good job on anything. The instructor seemed only to want you to know how to replace an instrument on an aircraft or make emergency repairs. The instructor didn't know much about any of the instruments, and didn't seem to care much.

About all this instructor wanted was to push us through his material and get ready for the next class coming behind us. This kind of attitude rubbed off on the class. Maybe it was that some of us were just getting tired of the routine of school. I tried to think that something I learned might, some day, keep me alive and bring me back home. I thought I could use some of this experience to make a better living for me and my wife. I would go home, some day, to be with my wife and, who knows, maybe have a family to raise. It seemed that I was always thinking about home.

In a week, we were out of Instruments and began studying Propellers in the propeller building. I found out there was a lot more to a propeller than just the blades. The propeller on the airplane I had flown back home was made of one piece of wood.

I learned that there were Curtis Electric propellers, Hamilton Standard Hydraulic propellers, propellers with two blades, three blades and four blades.

The standard joke was that the longest blade of the prop had to always point down so the oil would drain out of the props. The instructor would have us try to find the longest blade. Of course, all blades were the same length. Some students really thought there was a "longest blade."

## Emergency Pass Changes My Life

We had heard that the last four subjects of the mechanical school would be lots of fun and lots of action, with very little home work to do. We operated an aircraft engine on a test stand when we were studying engines. In Engine Operations, we would run an engine and go through its operation - idle, propeller pitches, malfunctions.

For a week, all we heard were engines running. The control booths were supposed to be sound proof but were far from it. Everyone would start an engine and run through its cycle, learn when it was misfiring and when it should be redlined.

Airplane engines were fun to operate. They were mounted on concrete stands and the air from their propellers was directed out the top of the building. We had a good instructor who allowed us to go through the operation by ourself.

The day before I was to graduate from the Engine Operations course, I returned to the barracks in the evening and was called to the commanding officer's office. "What have I done now?" I wondered.

In the office, I was told that my aunt in Memphis, the one who had raised me, was sick and dying. I could have a emergency 3-day pass to go to see her. This was a real surprise to me. I had not received any letters that even said she was sick. I told the officer, "I don't have enough money to buy a bus ticket to Memphis." He told me to go by the Red Cross office. "They'll see that you have enough money," he said.

I went to the Red Cross office. They gave me twenty-five dollars after I signed a lot of papers, instructing the pay master to deduct it from my next pay check.

I rushed to the barracks, put some clothes and personal gear in a bag, stuck it under my arm, and headed for the bus station. I loved my aunt, but I could not keep from thinking, "I am going to see my angel!" This went over and over through my mind. Like a hypnotic song.

At the station, while waiting for a bus to leave, I tried to phone my wife. There were no long distance lines available.

I was lucky that I didn't have to wait long for a bus to Memphis.

I was on the 7 p.m. bus from Biloxi. I had a full 12 hours to ride before I would be home. I would just sit and look out the window. Not even noticing the scenery passing by. Wondering what could be wrong with my aunt. Thinking about my wife.

I fell asleep and slept most of the way through the night.

The bus arrived in Memphis and the bus driver let me off on one of the main streets near my aunt's house. I walked several blocks. It all looked so familiar. It sure felt good to see Memphis again.

I soon arrived at my aunt's home. There she was, standing in the front door. I rushed up to her and hugged and kissed her. I

was glad to see her but I didn't understand. "I thought you were sick," I said.

Auntie explained to me. The doctor had requested that I come. She had some chest pains but was now doing fine. "I thought you might like to see Elizabeth so I let the doctor request for you to come," she said. "I will drive you out to your house.

"Elizabeth is waiting for you."

My aunt let me out of the car when we arrived at my house. I kissed her and thanked her for getting me there. I turned and rushed to the house. I almost had a stroke, rushing to the door.

My angel opened the door. I held her so tight I thought I would crush her ribs. As my aunt left, she said, "I will be expecting you for dinner tonight."

Elizabeth and I were the two happiest human beings in the world, the rest of the day. Our love for each other could not have been more perfect.

Elizabeth had rented part of our home to a couple to help meet expenses and give her a little extra money. The couple would be coming back soon.

It was now time for dinner. The day had passed so fast.

I got the car out and we drove in to town to have dinner with my aunt. Everyone that I ever knew was there for dinner. After a wonderful dinner and a lot of Hello's, my aunt told me we could spend the night in the house next to ours. It was her rental house. She said it was empty and furnished. Elizabeth and I could be by ourselves, without having the rental couple in the house with us. Auntie really had everything planned.

My angel and I were alone in my aunt's rental house. My aunt had fixed it up just for us. Elizabeth and I felt that we were in heaven together. We were so happy that we could hardly talk. Tears would come from our eyes as we held each other. We would hold and kiss each other and love each other as if there was never going to be a tomorrow.

We woke from a deep sleep the next morning, in each others arms. This was the day that would take us apart again. It seemed like the end of time had come to both of us. We would not turn loose of each other. We could not leave each other's side. We took our bath together. I even shaved holding her hand.

Time was passing and it came time to go. We drove by my aunt's home and then I met the bus on the highway. It was a long ride to Biloxi.

Once again, I found myself in a window seat, looking down at a beautiful blond girl on the platform. My angel. She was waving and saying goodbye with tears in her eyes. "When will I see her again?" I wondered.

On the trip back to Biloxi, I could only think of the past day and night with Elizabeth. How could it be so wonderful and come to an end so quickly.? If only I had the power to stop this thing called time and make it stand still as long as I wanted it to. I would live those wonderful moments forever.

I got to Biloxi faster than I wanted to. It was late in the night when I arrived. I reported in at the commanding officer's office, went to my bunk and crawled in. It was so lonely and I couldn't keep the tears from my eyes.

The next morning at roll call, I was told to move to another barracks. I would join a group taking the same subject I was when I left on the 3-day leave.

I spent the day getting assigned to another squadron and barracks. The barracks was about the same as the one that I had come from. I was assigned a bunk upstairs. I sure was going to miss my last barracks and the friends that I had made - Tom and Nick.

We had become such good friends. I guess that is why you really learn not to get too friendly with someone in the Army for you have to lose them too soon.

The routine here was about the same, except for having a barracks sergeant who was a bastard. His attitude affected the manners of everybody else in the barracks. Some fellows messed up, just to cause the sergeant trouble. Everything was always wrong in the sergeant's eyes. The barrack was always getting demerits.

## Coming Back From Heaven

My next class was Inspections. Everyone in the class was new to me. No one wanted to be very friendly. Nothing like my pals were in my other class. They wouldn't work together and everything seemed to go wrong. There were more goofoffs. Most of the fellows were from the northern part of the country, from around New York City.

Each night in the barracks, the few Southern boys there would start a discussion on the Civil War and we would verbally fight the war all over again. This got to be the best way we had found to pass the time. Everyone in the barracks had something to say and we had some very heated discussions.

The group was not eager to get together to study anything from the school. Most had the attitude they were there because they had to be. Which was true for all of us, but there was no reason not to make the best of it.

The Inspection courses were taught in the aircraft hangars and involved working on real aircraft. Some of the aircraft were real old but interesting to work with. There were a few B-18s, AT-6s, C-47s, C-46s and a few old bombers, so old they had open cockpits.

Pay day arrived. When I stepped up to get paid, I received no money. I owed the Army for laundry and the Red Cross loan money. I didn't much care that I didn't get any money. I was used to not having any. When I left Memphis, my aunt put five dollars in my pocket and I still had it to get by on. My wife had tried to give me some money but I wouldn't take it for I felt that she needed it worse than I did.

At the end of aircraft Inspection training, we were all in for a surprise. We were told to check out a parachute and meet at the flight line beside a C-47.

When we all arrived at the airplane, we saw that it was one of the aircraft that we had changed an engine on during our Inspection class. One of the fellows said, "I am not going to fly in that airplane. I don't know if the work I did was right or not." The instructor said, "We are all about to find out." Some of the fellows became really worried. It was beginning to dawn on them how truly important their work was. Lives depended on it. This would be the proof of the pudding. "You are about to reap what you did," our instructor said.

Everyone began to look the airplane over real good, including myself. We got in the airplane. The pilots came out and got in. The engines started. We taxied to the runway and off we went, with everyone holding their breath. It turned out to be a short but very nice flight. For some, this was their first flight.

In the Inspection classes, I had learned to drive tugs and pull aircraft, tool carts, and other equipment around the ramp. I was really feeling comfortable around aircraft and what I was now doing.

A few days before the end of my last Inspection class, I visited my old barracks one evening and talked with my friends, Nick and Tom. They seemed to be glad to see me and wondered where I had gone. Nick said, "I lost a lot of interest in school after you left the class." They told me they had orders to ship out and were going to the South Pacific. The whole class was going. They were made PFCs and would work on aircraft as ground crews, some place on an island.

I was to find out soon what my three days absence would do to my life. I would have gone with Tom, Nick and the others to ground crew duty if I had not left on the emergency leave.

I really didn't want to be on a ground crew.

I went to the commanding officer's office and asked about Cadet Training again. The commanding officer gave me permission to put in an application with them. I found their office and was given an application to fill out. The officer asked if I wanted to take the written test now. "We are giving one at noon," he said. I waited and took it.

The next day, the commanding officer gave me a note that said I had passed the test and in two weeks I could go before the Cadet Board for a review. The date was all set.

Graduation day at the Aircraft Mechanic School soon arrived. On May 12 we graduated, in formal ceremonies in one of the hangars, and were given a Certificate of Proficiency and the rank of First Class Private.

I had passed 640 hours of training. We felt we had accomplished something. I had passed with an average of 90.6.

The next few days we were sent to the gunnery range to qualify with the .45 automatic and the sub-machine gun. We would get up early and exercise, then go out to the range.

I would spend my evenings reading the letters that I had received from Elizabeth, and writing to her. Elizabeth had said, in one of her letters, that she had made plans to visit me in Biloxi, just before I came home on emergency leave. I knew that, if my wife had come to Biloxi, with her being that near, I would have gone AWOL to see her. I guess everything works out for the best.

The three days had put me in another class and caused my grades to drop. I had made a grade of 90 in my first class, and was now making high 80s in my second class.

I knew now that the attitude of people around you can have a great effect on how much you accomplish.

Five days after graduation, a roster was posted on the bulletin board in our barracks. My name was on it, along with eleven others. It said we were being assigned to the Aircraft Gunnery School at Laredo, Texas and would ship out the next morning.

"Oh, no," I thought. My appearance before the Cadet Review Board was still a week away. I ran to the commanding officer's office and asked to see him. He kept me waiting for some time. I told him about my orders to ship out, and asked about my appointment with the Cadet Review Board. He said, "I don't know anything about it. Your shipping orders are firm. Maybe you can do something about it at your next station." I was getting the feeling that he just didn't want to be bothered with it.

I found myself the next day on a slow train, looking out the window at oak and pine trees as we rolled down the tracks. Once in a while, I could see the ocean. "What am I getting into, now?" I wondered.

I had learned from the commanding officer, as he looked through my papers, that my grade average at Keesler made me eligible for Engineering Officers Training. But he had dropped the subject when he saw that orders had been cut for Laredo. I think he thought it would just be too much trouble for him to fool with. I was just another soldier.

I was kind of proud of the stripe that I had put on my sleeve while at Keesler. It would give me a little more money.

I noticed that the train was very comfortable. The seats were nice and soft. There was only one soldier to a seat. I could really stretch out.

I could see nothing but water and tall grass out the window. Sometimes it looked like the train was floating in water and grass. I thought we would go through New Orleans, but we must have gone around the city for we were then passing through a small town and onto a bridge across the Mississippi River. It wasn't long before the train was going through the swamps of Louisiana on the west side of the river.

My life had really changed in the last few months. One day I was the chief engineer of a large hotel, and the next I was an aircraft mechanic on a train to Texas.

My life had just begun to be worth living. My beautiful wife and I were so very happy together. Then my "friends and neighbors" saw to it that it all changed.

The area around the train was now getting to look more like a desert. The ground was covered in brown bushes. The train arrived late in the night in the middle of the desert in the small Texas town called Laredo.

We got off the train, and were standing in line for a head count when a hard rain started coming down. We rushed for the waiting trucks. We got under the canvas covers in the back.

I didn't know it rained in the desert. "I guess I have a lot to learn," I thought, listening to rain pelt the canvas top.

In about five minutes we were at the air base. The rain had stopped. When I got off the truck, the ground was dry as a bone. In fact, it was dusty. "What kind of country is this?" I wondered.

We were quickly taken to the mess hall to eat supper and then were assigned to a barracks. There seemed to be no waiting around at this base.

I had met a fellow from Massachusetts on the train. He ended up in the bunk next to me. Henry Parkhurst was his name. He seemed to be very nice but worried a lot. He was still kind of homesick, just like I was. I thought about Nick and Tom, my friends back at Keesler, and how quickly our association was over. I really needed someone else to talk to, someone who could think a little like I did.

The food at the mess hall was good. Steak, potatoes, greens, peas, and all kinds of fruit. I had never eaten an avocado before. I didn't know what it was until someone told me.

I sat on the end of the bunk, and wrote to my wife, telling her all about getting to Laredo. I told her I would be there for a while but I didn't know how long.

Parkhurst and I got into a long conversation about ourselves, and what we had done in Keesler. It was soon time for lights out. I didn't realize how tired I was until I got in the bunk. Sleep soon overcame me.

We were up early the next morning. After roll call, an officer gave us a complete schedule to follow for the day. Everything was very military. We were to be at given places at given times. There would be no excuses for being late. "You are military," the officer said. "There will be no second class military personnel on this post." We were to salute all officers and be respectful to all noncommissioned officers.

The officer continued to brief us. He said that, if we were kicked out of school or if we did not make passing grades, we would be "shipped off to the infantry."

"There will be an internal security group which will monitor your work while you are here," he said. Everyone called this group the "Gestapo." Members of the group were pointed out, and word was passed when any of them came around. When we finished our schedules, each day, the time left would be our own free time.

We were dismissed.

It was now late in the evening. We all sat around on our bunks. The day had passed quickly, without any snags and waiting around. I told Parkhurst, "The man running this show must be from the Old Army that I used to hear so much about."

I got out all the letters that I had received from my wife, and started to put them in order. In the last letter, Elizabeth mentioned money for the first time. She wrote that she did not get her allotments from the Army for four months, then got them all at one time. She said she was doing all right on her pay checks from work, plus my allotment. She had been able to pay all of the bills that we owed, and put some money in the bank. The car would not be useable very much longer for the tires were worn out. You could not find an auto tire to buy. She said she was not using all of her gasoline stamps or sugar ration stamps. She was working on the 3 to 11 p.m. shift at the B-25 plant, and trying to work all the overtime she could.

I was glad to hear that her finances were okay, for I didn't know what I could do about them, sitting here in Laredo. I sent a few dollars from my monthly pay check, but there wasn't much extra to send, after I paid my laundry bill and bought a few personal toilet articles from the post exchange. And sometimes a Coke. I would be receiving a dollar or two more, now that I was a private first class.

I could not keep from worrying about how my wife got home safe at midnight after she got off work. I wrote to my aunt and asked her to contact Elizabeth as often as she could.

It was now time for lights out. I talked to Parkhurst in the next bunk. He told me about his home life. He said he didn't have a real girl friend. I lay in the bunk, thinking about my wife, until I went to sleep.

We were up the next morning at 5 o'clock. We didn't have to march to the mess hall in a formation. However, after we ate and cleaned up ourselves and the barracks, we formed to march off to school at 7 o'clock.

For the next eight weeks, this was our routine: eight hours a day of class work and study for six days a week, with one day a

week off to catch up on homework and personal business. They had a time for everything.

The first class introduced us to the the type of armament that we would be depending on in the future. There was forty-five caliber automatic, thirty and fifty caliber machine guns, twelve gauge shotguns, and the shells and bullets for each. We were given a week to learn how to take each one apart and put it back together again while blind folded. We had to draw a picture of each part of each gun in our workbooks. We had to know their rate of fire and possible malfunctions.

There was an instructor and an assistant instructor to keep us busy every minute. The "Gestapo" dropped in to see that you were working on the right subject at the right time. I had the impression that the instructors were as afraid of them as the students were suppose to be.

The classroom work went real fast. After you took the guns apart, and put them back together several times with a blindfold on, it was easy. Parkhurst was my partner in the classroom. We worked together.

I didn't know what to do with my first day off. Parkhurst and I walked all over the base and went to a picture show at the base theater. It cost twenty-five cents each and we even bought a Coke and popcorn. The two of us really made a day of it around the base. We watched AT-6 trainer planes take off and land at the flight line.

The second week, we learned to identify airplanes. Shadows of aircraft would be placed on a screen. We would have three seconds to identify them. I didn't know one from the other, at first. By the end of the week, I was able to identify most of them. The instructors would concentrate on P-40s, P-47s, and Zeros, then try to confuse you with the shadow of an AT-6 which looked like a Zero. There were all types of bombers flashed on the screen but the instructors seemed more interested in teaching us to recognize fighters.

I got so tired of looking at shadows of fighter airplanes, day after day. I didn't want to see one again. But the day was fast coming when I would see them in swarms - swarms of the real thing.

We studied gun mounts and remote turrets, electrically operated turrets, and hydraulic turrets. The turret mock ups gave you a feeling of how confined you were in a turret. They made you feel you were out there in the sky all alone. I wondered if that was the way it really felt. We learned how to use the N-6 sight, and the

seventy mil sight. The N-6 sight was a mechanical and optical sight. I never knew there was so much to sighting a gun. We memorized pages and pages of instructions. Through a seventy mil ring sight at 1,000 yards, the cone of vision is seventy yards. Sight base equals distance between eye rings. Advantages equal the range, distance and lead. Optical N-6 sights can be used at night, in sunlight, and with both eyes. There was the K-4 Sperry computing sight. This sight compensated for all ballistics.

Well, I was learning and drawing pictures, and making written reports on things that I had never heard of before. Things like, ballistics, trajectory, or path of bullet in flight, air resistance, or friction, rotation, torque, mount movement, forces that increase and decrease velocity of projectile, things such as bullet jump, drift and yaw.

I thought, "If I learn all of this stuff, my head will split and if I don't, I will be shipped out to the infantry and get my head split there." So I thought, "With what little brain power I have, I had better try to absorb everything I can."

Still more was thrown at us. Harmonization equals aligning of bore and sight so as to form a definite pattern at a given distance. The distance a bullet will travel, how far it will drop in a trajectory.

"I used to think I could sight a gun," I told Parkhurst.

My notebook was getting full and I wasn't half way through school. The guys who dreamed this school up sure tried to pack everything in it they could find for you to study. Maybe it takes all of this to shoot a gun in the air at another airplane. I was beginning to feel like a calculator.

After mess each evening, and the study period, I would lie down on my bunk, and just fall asleep. Parkhurst complained that he couldn't keep up with all of this mess they were throwing at us.

I kept telling him, "Let's just absorb all we can and they will pass us through or kick us out." He was doing as well as I was doing but he would just worry about everything. "As long as we are still here, we must be doing all right," I said. The book work and report writing kept getting heavier and harder.

I missed several nights writing to my wife. I was beginning to think this school was getting to me.

The pace kept up. New things were added. I was sent through a decompression chamber and tested for flights above 30,000 feet in altitude. Eight of us at a time were put inside a big tank with thick windows in it. We were given oxygen masks and

taught how to use them. We were told what pure oxygen would do for us.

The big door of the decompression tank opened. We walked in and sat on seats lining each side of the tank. The big door closed. Locking it made all kinds of noise. A hissing sound started. The big gauge at the end of the tank started moving. It stopped at ten. The instructor, watching us through the window, said over a public address system in the tank, "You are at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Put your oxygen masks on and plug them into the supply outlet beside you." We all put them on and tested them. The needle on the gauge started moving up again. It stopped at thirty. The atmosphere inside the tank now simulated the atmosphere we would encounter at 30,000 feet.

It didn't seem to make much difference if you were breathing pure oxygen. Everything seemed a little brighter. The voice on the speaker said, "Robinson, John H. 34496440. Take your mask off and write your name on the pad in front of you."

I took my mask off. Breathing seemed to be about the same. I started writing my name. The first time, I wrote it fine. The next time, my hand would not do what my mind was telling it to do. I started to laugh. I could see everyone else pointing at me.

The lights got real bright and then dim. I passed out. When I came to, someone had put my oxygen mask over my face. The voice on the speaker said, "Robinson, in three minutes, without oxygen, you would have been dead. Dead. Don't ever forget the feeling that you just had." Each soldier in the tank had to take off his mask and feel the effects of insufficient oxygen. The tank was then compressed to normal atmospheric pressure and the door was opened. We all felt kind of scared.

It didn't look like they were going to overlook anything. After they couldn't think of anything else to do, they let us try shooting the weapons, using all the things that we had been studying about: ballistics, guns, aircraft turrets, sights, ammunition, electrical circuits, hydraulics, bomb sights, gun mounts, identification of aircraft. Now we had to put all these skills together and find out how much we had learned.

"How do we do that?" I wondered.

I started out the next week on the gunnery range, keeping company with a .30 caliber air-cooled Browning machine gun. The gun was on a mount with a steel strap across its barrel to keep it from turning. I asked the instructor what the strap was for. He said, "To keep you guys from killing each other."

The first man up to fire the machine gun pulled the trigger. The noise scared him so badly that he turned the machine gun loose. The gun kept on firing until it ran out of bullets. Without that steel strap to hold it, it would have whipped around in our direction.

Several others did the same thing. When my turn came, I wanted to drop the gun but I held onto it. The report of the gun and the feel really did scare you at first. The gun wanted to swing around, due to its rate of fire.

The instructor said, "This gun has a malfunction in it to make it run away. The reason is, to give you a feel for a gun out of control. Well, it gave you the feeling, all right. We were shown how to stop a runaway gun. I had shot a lot of guns but the machine gun was very different.

After a few days of shooting, I lost most of the fear of shooting it. The fifty caliber would completely destroy the target. All you had to do was shoot at the target and hit it.

Then we went to the fifty caliber machine gun range. I thought the thirty caliber was noisy. Boy! The fifty caliber made the thirty sound like a baby. After a few days of shooting the fifty caliber with the metal strap, we started shooting with an unrestrained fifty caliber which we had complete control of.

## A Strange Weekend in Old Mexico

I was now feeling real comfortable with machine guns. I felt I could fire any gun without jumping or being afraid. I had really done my share of shooting the past week.

At the halfway mark in gunnery school we were given a weekend pass to go into town.

Parkhurst and I got all dressed up in our Sunday best and took off.

Laredo was just about like I had expected. It was a very small town, hot and dry with sand blowing through it all the time. The Mexicans had a lot of avocado stands up and down the streets. Mexicans were everywhere, trying to sell you something. Parkhurst didn't like avocados and I sure didn't. We walked all over town all day long, looking at shops. I was not sure if there were more soldiers or Mexicans in the town. It was about even. There were very few American civilian men and women there.

Parkhurst and I spent the night back at camp. The next day we were up early and decided we would go across the Rio Grande River and look over Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. I had heard all kinds of impossible tales about things across the river in Mexico - and its women.

We walked to the bridge, were checked by the border patrol and walked across the bridge into Nuevo Laredo. As soon as we got across, I began to smell an open sewer somewhere. We walked on and the smell got worse. The smell turned out to be coming from meat hanging in an open market in the town square. Boy! What a smell it was.

A horse and buggy driver stopped us and asked if we wanted to see the sights. He said two American dollars. Everything seemed to cost two American dollars.

Parkhurst and I got in the buggy. The driver hit the horse and down the road we went. We rode down a lot of little narrow dirt streets, passing shack after shack on each side. The little mud shacks were all side by side. Each had one door and appeared to have about one room. Women were sitting outside by the doors.

The buggy pulled up in front of a larger house that was set back from the street and had a wall around it. The buggy driver pointed for us to go in. He said they had a show in the house that we could see. He would wait for us. The house was called "Maria Theresa's." Parkhurst and I really weren't sure that we wanted to go in. The driver kept pointing. We saw other GIs going in so we decided we would, too.

We went through the front door into a big room. A Mexican girl met us and showed us to a couch to sit on. There were several sailors and GIs sitting on benches and couches around the sides of the room. The Mexican girl served us a Coke and wanted two American dollars for it. We paid for the Coke and thought maybe that was the charge for the show,

We started drinking the Cokes. I could not believe what I saw next. The Mexican girl was bringing a little donkey into the middle of the room. The girl took her robe off and danced around without any clothes on. Then, in the middle of the room, she bent over with her back to the donkey. The donkey immediately put his front legs on her back and started having sex with her.

About the same time, another Mexican woman came out with no clothes on. She had a big knife in her hand. She stuck the handle of the knife between her legs and up into her, moving it back and forth. Then she started dancing with it in her. We were both

sitting there in complete amazement. Some of the GIs were jumping up and down and hollering at the two girls.

The girls picked us out and came over and sat by us. They tried to put their legs across us. I got up at the same time Parkhurst did. The girls said, "What's wrong? You no like what I got?" I told Parkhurst, "Let's get the hell out of here." Out the front door we went. All I could think about was the Army's sex training film that I had seen in basic training. I sure wasn't going to look like the guys in that movie did

As soon as we were outside, I started looking for our buggy. The buggy and the driver were gone. Parkhurst and I could hardly believe the woman in there, having sex with the donkey.

Two GIs rode up to us on bicycles and asked if we were going back to the bridge over the Rio Grande. They asked us to take the bikes back and turn them in at the bridge before we went back into the States. They gave us a ticket and said the bike rental had been paid. They would take a buggy back when they were ready to go. Our buggy was gone and this was better than walking, so we took the bikes and rode off.

We soon were passing through those small streets with all the mud shacks on each side. Beside each door, sitting in a chair, was a woman. As we passed each woman they would spread their legs apart, pull up their robe and point at themselves and say, over and over, "One American dollar."

We would try to pay no attention to them and then they would run out into the street behind us and try to poke their finger in our behind. Both of us would swing our arms at them to make them get away. We rode as fast as we could, trying to get away from them. I told Parkhurst, "Now I know why the two GIs wanted us to take the bikes back to the bridge." There were several blocks of fighting off the Mexican women before we got safely out of the area.

We reached the street leading to the bridge, turned and headed toward it. I thought, "If this is Mexico, I have had enough of it." I hadn't seen more than one or two pretty girls among all the women on the streets. They were all short, fat or plump and looked real dirty.

We arrived at the place to turn the bikes in and gave the tickets to a Mexican. He looked at the tickets and said, "Two American dollars." We tried to tell him that it had been paid already but, instead of arguing with him, we paid him two American dollars

so we could get on across the bridge and back into the good old U. S. A.

Even little Laredo looked good to us as we crossed the bridge. We still could hardly believe what we had seen: an animal having sex with a Mexican woman. We had seen it with our own eyes. Parkhurst and I talked about our experience in Mexico all the way back to the base.

We arrived at camp and that was the first and last time I went to Mexico.

After the weekend pass, we were back in school again. Now I was on the skeet range, shooting flying skeet targets with a twelve gauge shotgun. I shot that shotgun all day long, turning my shoulder black and blue. It was getting to hurt every time I fired it.

I had not seen Parkhurst all day. I thought he was on another range. When I got back to the barracks, Parkhurst was there, packing his barracks bag. He told me he was shipping out the next day. He said they had washed him out. Parkhurst never did say why. He said he didn't know where he was going.

This was a real blow to me for I had worked up a real friendship with the guy. He called me "Old Buddy" all the time. He was really the only close friend that I had made. There were several others that I studied with and walked around with, but Parkhurst was the only one I could talk to freely. Now he was leaving. I thought, "Well, that's the Army way."

Parkhurst left the next day while I was at the skeet range.

I would see him again in a most unexpected way.

I was getting to where I could shoot and hit twenty-four out of twenty-five flying skeet targets. My shoulder was black and swollen. I believe if I had to do much more shooting I would have gone on sick call. I took long, warm showers at night and the warm water helped my shoulder a little.

We were sent to a movable base range where we shot from the hip.

## Baby-sitting Rattlesnakes

Here I stood, strapped on the back of a flat bed truck that was moving at thirty miles an hour across the desert. Every few yards, I passed a spot where a little round, black skeet disc was flying through the air. You had to shoot fast and hope to hit it. The

skeet flying targets came at you from both sides of the road. After I learned to lag and lead, I began to get pretty good at hitting the disc. You had to hold the shotgun at your hip and fire. This kind of shooting was really fun.

All fun things are always followed by things that are not so much fun.

My turn came to sit in a little hole in the middle of the desert in the hot sun, operating a machine that tossed skeet targets into the air. Guys driving by would shoot at them. It was hot as hell in the hole. There was a piece of tin over the top of the hole with dirt on it so the men in the trucks couldn't see where the skeet discs were coming from.

I had been instructed not to move a box of skeet discs until I had carefully looked behind the box. Rattlesnakes would get behind the boxes to escape the desert sun and keep cool. Every box I picked up, I thought I was seeing a rattlesnake. Before I would reach in a box to get a target to put in the sling, I poked a piece of cardboard in it first.

As I was leaving the pit in the evening to get in the truck, just outside the pit was a rattler. I jumped out of my skin and ran to the truck. The instructor shot the rattlesnake with the shotgun.

I sure didn't want that job again. I only had to work in the pit that one day. Thank God, I didn't have to spend any more days sitting in the desert, baby-sitting rattlesnakes.

After a few days on the movable base range, I was sent back to the skeet range.

I could now hit twenty-five flying skeet targets out of twenty-five. As much as I had been shooting, I should never miss a target. I was really getting so tired of shooting that I didn't know what to do.

An expert rifleman came to the range to show us how we could really learn to shoot if we wanted to. His name was Herb Parson. With a rifle, he could hit a dime thrown into the air. He could use a handgun and hit a target with his back turned to it. He could shoot blindfolded and hit a target. He never missed. I didn't think anyone on earth could shoot the way he did.

When I returned to the barracks each night, after firing on the range all day, I was so tired that I would fall right to sleep. I could hardly keep my eyes open to read the letters from Elizabeth, my wife.

There was still a lot of report writing and testing on ballistics. Homework seemed to go on forever.



Baby-sitting rattlesnakes . . .

It was two weeks since I had been in Mexico. In the middle of the night, officers came into the barracks and got us out of bed. We stood at attention at the foot of our bunks. We were given a "short arm" inspection. The officers, possibly doctors, would walk in front of you and tell you to drop your shorts. Then they would shine a flashlight on your private member and then move to the next man. When they had checked everyone, they dismissed us and we went back to bed. The inspection made you feel like you were a cow or something. Of course, they were looking for anyone who might have a venereal disease. After seeing Mexico, I could see how someone could get a disease. Some GIs had not been able to resist the Mexican temptations.

I was told that next I would have to qualify at hitting a target towed through the air, shooting from the back seat of an AT-6 trainer that was in flight.

Up early the next morning, I rushed to get to the flight line on time. I had been told to be there at 6 o'clock. I picked up my four ammunition belts and two boxes about a foot long that were filled with thirty caliber ammunition. I put the belts crisscrossed over my shoulders. I was carrying at least seventy pounds of ammunition. What a load.

Off across the hot concrete ramp I went, carrying the ammunition toward the aircraft that were lined up, waiting for us. I spotted the number on the aircraft I was assigned. A young pilot was standing beside it. He was very nice. He said to put the ammunition in the back seat and get the belts ready to feed through the machine gun. My bullets were dipped in green paint and I got the paint all over me. They would know when I hit the cloth target because my bullets would leave a ring of green paint where they went through.

The pilot said, "Ever been in an airplane before?" I said I had a private pilot license and a lot of hours in a J-3 Cub. He said, "Good, we'll have some fun." The pilot and I hit it off pretty good. He told me what to expect. He said I wanted to keep my own belt straps short because I would be standing up while shooting the gun and swinging it around. I got in the rear cockpit and buckled on my parachute and put on my helmet and goggles. I connected my headset and throat mike and my safety straps. I was ready. It felt good, sitting down in the seat. The straps would give me freedom to move but would not let me fall out of the aircraft. The machine gun was on a track around the top of the rear cockpit and was strapped in place when it was not being fired.

The pilot got in and started the engine. The ground crew pulled the chocks from the wheels and we taxied across the ramp and out to the runway for takeoff.

We approached the runway and there were two AT-6 aircraft that came up beside us. The three of us took off at the same time and flew side by side. We climbed to about 5,000 feet. The desert looked all brown and, once in a while, there was a dirt road. The sun was bright and hot, with no clouds in the sky. The wind really felt good across my face.

We were flying along, side by side, and waving to each other. We could have talked to each other if it had not been for the noise of the engines and props.

My airplane was right wing man. Everything was going fine. I was really enjoying the ride. We kept getting closer and closer to each other. The pilots started tapping wing tips together, touching and bumping. This wing tapping business kept up for a while. Then my pilot said over the intercom, "Unstrap your gun, load and fire a burst." I quickly loaded, unstrapped and fired. I was ready. The pilot said, "Check your safety straps." I said, "All okay."

In front of us I saw the cloth target flapping in the breeze behind the plane towing it. My pilot lifted the airplane up out of the tight formation we had been flying in, up above the other AT-6s, then flopped over and fell upside down toward the towed target.

I was hanging by the straps and holding onto the gun for dear life. Now I knew what the straps were for. The pilot said, "Start shooting." I thought, "Damn. I don't even know where the target is." I was worried about being upside down. I finally knew the ground was under my head. The target had to be to my left. I swung the gun to that side. A ship that looked upside down to me was pulling a target, coming up out there fast. I just started shooting in that direction in bursts. We were almost on the damned tow target. I fired directly into the sock as I passed. The next thing I knew, the sky was above my head again. My stomach was still in my throat. I knew that we had made a complete flop over, passing the target. The pilot did a 360 degree turn and headed back for the target.

The other two trainers had followed a short distance behind us. This time, the target was on my right. We were closing on it fast, at about the same level. I had the thing in my sight and started firing over our wing, giving it short bursts all the way, until we

were well past the target. I didn't have to lead the target this time because we were flying directly at it all the time.

Some of my ballistics classroom work was coming to mind. I thought, "Maybe all that stuff will stay in my head and come out when I really need it." We only made two passes at the target and then headed back to the airfield. On the way, the pilot said, "Good shooting."

As we neared the airfield, all three planes let down and landed at the same time, side by side. We taxied to the ramp and parked and cut the engines. The pilot jumped down and said again, "Good shooting. I didn't think you could even find the target when I flopped over. I believe you really have flown before." I smiled, knowing my face was still white because I could still feel being upside down.

I got out carefully and onto the ground. The pilot walked on. I took out the empty ammunition belts and what was left in the boxes. I put it all on a waiting buggy and walked across the concrete ramp to operations and checked in. The way I felt, I wondered if I had hit the damned target. My instructor said I would find out tomorrow. "We will have the target for you to look at then," he said. I checked in my parachute and headed back to the barracks.

I still was a little dizzy from the flight. I took a shower, then walked to the mess hall. I didn't think I was going to eat but when I got there, I was hungry after all. Back at the barracks I sat down and wrote Elizabeth all about flying. I wrote all about the pilots bumping wing tips for fun while flying at 3,000 feet in the air.

The next day, I rushed through the morning routine and down to the flight line. I was anxious to find out if I had hit the target.

We had an early class in the operations building. There were two tow targets lying on the floor. I couldn't believe it when I first looked at our target. There were green bullet rings all over it, a few silver holes and a few red. The green holes were everywhere. I hadn't realized how long the target was. It sure did look small when it was in the air.

The instructor was real complimentary on my performance. I was told to do it again on the afternoon flight coming up.

I had to be at the airplane, ready to take off, at 1300 hours. I skipped lunch and went to get my ammunition. I had to wait to get it. When I did, I couldn't find a buggy to put it on. Again I put the

heavy belts over my shoulders, picked up two boxes of ammunition and headed for the airplanes.

It was now 12:56 p.m. I could see my airplane. The pilot was waiting in the cockpit of my airplane with the engine running. He watched me until I was about fifty feet from his plane. Then he revved up the engine and left me standing there on the ramp with four heavy belts of ammunition on my shoulders and holding two heavy boxes of ammunition - looking at my airplane leaving me behind.

I went back to my instructor and told him what had happened. It was almost fifteen minutes after 1 o'clock. The instructor gave me a lecture about being late at the flight line.

I began to think they were going to kick me out of the school. In a few minutes, the instructor came back in and said, "The pilot you were assigned to has done the same thing to the other students. It looks like he jumped the gun and left you standing there on the ramp." He looked at my high shooting scores from the previous day and said, "I don't think you have anything to worry about."

I went back to the barracks, thinking how easy it would be to get washed out of this damned school. Henry Parkhurst came to my mind. "Why did he leave and what are they doing with him now?" I wondered. I told some of the other guys at the barracks about the pilot leaving me behind. Two fellows said the same thing had happened to them.

On the next flight, everything went well. The pilot was very friendly and was a good pilot. He didn't bump wings and didn't turn me upside down. He was very considerate and wasn't trying to be cocky or a hot shot. He gave me very good shots at the target. I really enjoyed the day, flying with him. He talked to me on the intercom. He seemed concerned about my comfort and safety.

I was hoping, if I ever flew with a combat crew, I would have a pilot like him.

After air-to-air gunnery, came air-to-ground gunnery. Each day, I was out on the flight line and in an airplane. Instead of firing at a passing target, we were shooting down at old airplanes on the ground. Some planes were parked out in the desert. Our pilot would dive at the target and I would be firing at it as we shot past. Being so close to the ground, watching the ground pass through your sights so fast, would make you feel a little woozy. After a few hours of flying and shooting at ground targets, you were really glad to be back on the ground.

You could quickly tell the difference when you were flying with a good pilot or with someone who thought he was hot. I had met instructors who were like that in civilian flying. I had liked to fly dual with an instructor named Charles Pshew. He was calm and understanding. He was beginning to make a good pilot out of me when a letter from my "friends and neighbors" sent me out here into the desert to fly upside down in an AT-6 and to fire on an old airplane parked on the ground.

It was July 1943 and hot. The temperature was just *hot* - there was no other word for it. It would rain, late every afternoon, for about five minutes. Then, in the next five minutes, dust and sand would be blowing in your face again.

It was now getting close to the end of gunnery school. We spent the next week flying an old two-engine Beechcraft B-18. It was equipped with a gun turret in the top of the fuselage.

Four of us at a time would fly in it with an instructor aboard. We would fire the guns at a towed target. The airplane would almost shake apart every time the turret machine guns fired. I would think the vibrations were going to destroy the old airplane.

## The Magical Silver Wings

After our last flight in the old Beechcraft, we were told to report to the quartermaster and get some new clothing. It was a pleasant surprise.

They gave us new, black, shiny, low top shoes and a new summer uniform with a new pair of pants for the winter uniform which they gave us when we first got there. The old pants were not as nice as the ones being issued now. Everything fit.

Names were placed on the bulletin board to be in formation in full dress, summer uniforms at 1900 hours the following day. My name was on the list. The names of many of the men in our class were not on the list.

We stood rigidly at attention and a band was playing. Officers and instructors sat on a stand in front of us. One at a time, we stepped up to the front and were presented a pair of sergeant's stripes by an officer with general's stars on his shoulders. The general pinned a pair of silver wings on the left breast pocket of my uniform, then shook my hand and congratulated me "for finishing the toughest school of this type that there is, anywhere in the

world." I thanked him and stepped back. I was so proud of the wings that I was about to burst. "Silver wings," I kept saying to myself. Several officers made speeches. The last one congratulated all of us for completing one of the most disciplined and difficult schools that the Army had. Laredo was considered in Army circles to be the best school in the world. The officer said discipline here was equal to discipline at the Army Academy. His speech made you feel proud at being part of it.

We were dismissed. Everyone grabbed and began to hug each other. We all were so very proud and glad it was all over.

After the formation was dismissed, I went by the post exchange and bought a needle and thread. I went back to the barracks and sewed my sergeant's stripes on all of my uniforms. My chest was sticking out, to better display the silver wings. I packaged the small silver wings they had given me to send home to my wife. The next day, at the post exchange I bought my wife a gold pin designed like sergeant stripes. I mailed the wings, the pin and my old PFC stripes to Elizabeth, my wife. I wrote and said, "The sergeant's rating comes with a raise in pay."

After all the excitement, the next few days were dull. I didn't know what to do with my freedom. I polished my shoes and my wings and my buttons. I read the bulletin boards, waiting for orders to do something. I thought, "I'd still like to fly an airplane." So I went to headquarters and asked about the flight cadet program.

Everyone seemed to be nice to me. "My new rank has some merit," I thought. I was sent to another office for an interview. The interviewing officer looked through some papers and said, "There is no cadet board to take your application at this base, sergeant. I have, however, a request for liaison pilots for use by the Infantry. I may be able to do something for you there." I wasn't sure I wanted to be in the Infantry although I would be flying the same type of aircraft I had flown as a civilian. I told him I would like to think about it for a few days. I saluted and left.

I thought about it for a day or two. Infantry just didn't sound too good.

The days went by slowly. We did calisthenics in the morning. The rest of the day was free. I was about to go back to see the officer about the Infantry opening when my name was posted on the bulletin board. I was to ship out the following morning. I spent the evening packing. I had accumulated a lot of notes and books. They would be heavy in my pack. I packed only

the books and notes I might need and I mailed the rest to my wife to store for me.

The day was unusual.

When our truck arrived alongside the tracks at the train station in Laredo, there were already thirty GIs waiting. There were thirteen in our group. The officer in charge was very military in his manner. We were assigned to a train coach and given individual orders and records. The orders read that we were going to Salt Lake City, Utah.

This was the first time since I had been in the Army that I had carried my own records and travel orders. In fact, this was the first time that I knew in advance where I was going. I had my financial and personal records. I was beginning to think that sergeants were not treated like a bunch of cattle.

When we boarded the train coach, it was a Pullman with only two of us assigned to a seat. We were travelling in style, compared to the other troop trains I had been on. Some of the men who were in my barracks were on the Pullman with me. I got to know them better on one train ride than during the eight weeks living in the same barracks.

I thought, These fellows are the cream of the crop. The Army seems to weed us out even further, each place we go.

There was John Kyzer from Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Carl Kelly from Birmingham, Alabama; John Tolito from Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Percy Hill from Union City, Mississippi; Charles Shepard from Bose Hill, Mississippi; James Roberts from Hattiesburg, Edward Liles from Gastoria, North Carolina; Samural Henry from Atlanta, Georgia; Winston Anderson from Raleigh, North Carolina, plus a few Yankees such as Frederick Schultz from Buffalo, New York; Harley Tuck from Washington, D. C., David Toporafaky from New York and Louis Samsone from New York.

There were others who had been with us in the barracks in Laredo but I didn't know what had happened to them.

Especially Henry Parkhurst.

Everyone in our Pullman car was surprised at the comforts we had on the train, surprised not to be packed like sardines.

The train pulled out of Laredo and in a short time we were in open desert waste land. The train was going about as fast as it could. I thought we were really on the Express. Looking out the windows, I thought, "How could anyone survive in all this waste land? I guess the whole West is like this."

The train was moving fast and by late morning we were beginning to see trees. Shortly after noon, the train rolled into Fort Worth, Texas.

Alongside the tracks were hundreds of girls, waving as we rolled in and slowed to a stop. Box lunches were being brought on board.

All of us lowered our windows and hung out as far as we could. The girls ran up to us. Some held our hands and some would kiss us. They gave us notes with their addresses on them and begged us to write to them. As the train started blowing its whistle and pulling away, the girls started giving us oranges and flowers. I had never been welcomed anywhere like this before. The girls would see our silver wings and scream "Fly boys!" They would scream and wave. I had never seen as many pretty girls at one time. They would try to hug and kiss you as the train was rolling slowly by. The silver wings just seemed to excite them and they kept hollering, "We love Air Force sergeants!" I thought silver wings and sergeant's stripes must have their rewards - and this was one of them. The train moved on through Dallas, Texas. There were girls and people all the way through.

After passing through Dallas we were soon out in the open country. There were more trees and the ground was now green with grass. The lunch boxes were passed around. The sandwiches were good and fresh. The train now seemed to go slowly and sometimes just crawl.

Night was soon with us. Everyone was getting pretty quiet. The conductor and porters came by and made our seats into full beds. This was the best thing that ever happened. A good soft bed to sleep on.

We had been given another lunch box for supper. My stomach was full and I was getting tired. A bed on the train was high living for Army travelers. We crawled into bed, still talking about the Texas girls and how pretty they were. Before I went to sleep, I wrote to Elizabeth and told her about all the pretty Texas girls. I wrote that I was now on my way to Salt Lake City and didn't know how long I would be there.

This time, I made sure that I had plenty of paper and envelopes to write letters. I would try to mail the letters along the way.

The next morning, we all were up early and took turns getting to the latrine, shaving and cleaning up. We made our beds back into seats and were ready for the day.

The conductor came through and told us that the train had picked up a dining car and we would be served breakfast in the diner. He told us it was three cars to the rear and was ready to serve us. Breakfast was not a bad one for a train: scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, jam, milk or coffee. Served to us by porters!

The day became long and tiresome. Some men played cards. Others, like myself, just watched the scenery and wondered what the future held for us. We knew nothing about the war and what was taking place in the world. We didn't have a radio. We had not seen a newspaper during gunnery school. The rest of the world didn't exist for us. This was our world right now. We lived it one day at a time.

The train was now getting into hill country. The conductor told us we were in Arkansas. The scenery was green and the hills could almost be called mountains.

For five days, the train would go fast for a while, come to a complete stop, then go fast again, then slow, stop and wait, and then go fast again.

We all were looking pretty worn out. We had on the same summer uniforms that we started out the trip in Laredo. They looked like washed out pajamas with silver wings dangling on them. The train again passed through a day of flat land with tall grass everywhere. Someone said they thought it was wheat.

The train entered some mountains and we began winding alongside the banks of a beautiful, cool mountain stream. The scenery was beautiful. We went through tunnel after tunnel in the heart of the mountains. Then it came out in a long valley with high peaks on each side of it. The train followed the curving foot of the mountains and finally began slowing down. Out the window, I could see that we were entering a small town. We rolled slowly past some passenger platforms and then stopped.

The platforms suddenly filled with people. There were pretty girls of all ages. We opened our windows and the girls would reach for our hands and wave and smile at us.

The girls were holding up big apricots. When the train stopped we would lean out the windows and they would kiss us. The older women were waving little American flags and they would kiss us, too.

It was so very nice to see that someone was caring enough for us to meet our train as we passed through.

The train pulled on through the little town and down into a large valley.

## On the Temple Steps

As the train was coming out of the mountains, you could see Salt Lake City and part of the Great Salt Lake itself in the distance. The train pulled into the city and soon was stopping in the train station. Salt Lake City, I could see, was a pretty good sized place.

We were met at the train station by a number of Army trucks and officers. They must have known we were coming. One of the officers was taking up our records as we got off the train. We all got into trucks after putting our bags in another truck. They didn't waste any time and we quickly arrived at a big building on the base. We were immediately taken into a big room and told to take off our clothes and pass through the shower. They gave us big sacks and said, "Put your dirty clothes in here." We looked like cattle going through a tunnel. I took everything off except my dog tags.

The long shower room had forty or fifty shower heads running warm water, with bars of soap on the shelves. The water felt good and I must have stayed under the shower for twenty minutes or more. No one was trying to hurry us. Everyone was taking his time. I had five days of dirt and sweat on me and I knew you could smell me a mile.

After the shower, we went into a room full of face bowls and plenty of big towels. On the shelves were plenty of razors and blades. I put a new blade in a razor and shaved. There was even rose water to use after shaving. I passed on into another room, still with no clothes except for a big towel wrapped around me. I gave my name and serial number to a sergeant and walked on into another room where there were several doctors in white coats. The doctors were very nice to us. They asked about our long train ride and if we enjoyed the trip.

As I passed down the line of doctors, they listened to my chest, stomach and back. They looked at my hind end, down my throat and into my eyes. The last one asked if I had any complaints or pains. He could see by our right shoulders that we had all come from gunnery school. Everyone's right shoulder was black and blue from the shotgun butt print on it.

After the physical, we were sent to another room and given new underwear and our bags. We then dressed and put on what

clean uniforms we had brought with us. I rolled up my dirty clothes and put them back in my barracks bag.

Our barracks were quite spacious. We were not crowded together. I was about to get settled in when an officer came in and gave each of us a pass to go to Salt Lake City any time we were free and not assigned to some duty. He said that our name would appear on the board on the morning of any day on which we were asked to meet some scheduled event or assignment. Always check the board at 10 a.m. and again at 2100 hours, he said. "If your name is not on the board," he said, "you are free for the day."

This was a real switch to us for Army life. Being a sergeant really had its advantages. Or, maybe it was the silver wings. Most of us were so proud of our wings that, when we took a shower, we unpinned them from our shirts and hooked them onto our dog tags. I really wasn't going to loose my wings. Not after I had earned them through that Gestapo gunnery school ordeal.

I had plenty of time to catch up on my letters to Elizabeth. I always started by writing, "My Beautiful Angel, I love you." I told her I was now in Salt Lake City and that I didn't know how long I would be there. I said I had not received a letter from her in more than a week. "As soon as I light somewhere," I wrote, "I will send my address. But keep writing to my old address and, maybe, all your letters will catch up with me some day."

Elizabeth's letters were all I was living for. Everything else was just happening automatically.

I read the bulletin board at 2100 hours that evening and found that I was to report at 9 o'clock the next morning to take a test of some kind.

I arrived at the building the next morning with several other sergeants. I gave my name, rank and serial number to the soldier at the desk and he sent me to an office. I entered the office and a medical officer was there, alone in the room. He had me to sit down and then started asking me questions about my personal life. He was very nice and polite. He asked about my sex life, my wife, my childhood. The way he asked, put you at ease about talking. He asked about all the ills that I had ever had. He picked my brain about small issues, both political matters and my love of country, about the good old U. S. A. and if I had ever been out of the country. Even about my little trip across the border into Mexico while I was in gunnery school. All the time, he was writing and filling out a form. This interview must have taken half of the morning. He just had a way of keeping you talking.

He wanted to know about my religious upbringing and my thoughts on God. My answers must have pleased him. When the conversation neared its end, there was a silence between us. The officer continued to write as he finished. He looked up at me and said, "Sergeant, you will be a great asset to the Air Force and your country. I am glad to have had the opportunity to talk with you and meet you. I wish you the very best of luck." I thanked him, stood up and saluted. He returned the salute. Then I turned and walked out, feeling pretty good about the interview. I knew that this had been some kind of a psychoanalysis exam.

I guess I was about normal. Anyway, the doctor seemed to be impressed with me. That was more kind words than I had ever received in this Army.

After the interview, I ate lunch and came back to the barracks. I looked at the bulletin board. There was my name again. I was to be shipped out the next day at noon.

Three of us decided that if we were going to see Salt Lake City, we had to do it that afternoon. We got dressed up and walked to the front gate. The military police at the gate told us the city wasn't very far. We walked there in a few minutes.

The people we passed on the streets were very friendly and they all spoke to us. Several young ladies stopped and talked to us. They wanted to know where we were from. We walked down by the Great Salt Lake. The edge of it was white. The weather was warm but pleasant. We walked on downtown. We went in a barber shop and got a haircut, then walked down to the Mormon Temple grounds. We went up to the temple and sat on the front steps. The grounds were very pretty.

Several young and very pretty girls came to sit down beside us and start talking to us. They wanted to know how long we would be in Salt Lake City. "We don't know," I said. We knew next to nothing about our own future.

It really felt good to talk to a girl again. It seemed forever since I had a conversation with a female. We had to leave the girls on the steps of the temple. It was beginning to get dark so we started back to camp. We found the street that we came in on, and we walked back the same way to the base.

The mountains in the distance were very pretty as it got darker. It had been a very nice day. Everyone had been nice to us. Even the clerks in the stores were nice to us. It was a big difference from the people we had met in Biloxi and Laredo where the store

clerks didn't give a damn about you. Here, the people would speak and seem to enjoy talking to you.

By the time we walked to the base and back to our barracks, it was getting late. I washed up and went to bed, thinking about shipping out tomorrow. Most everything I had was packed and ready to go.

I was up the next morning at 5 o'clock. I cleaned up and went to mess. I put all of my gear in a pile with the others who were to ship out with me. A sergeant came in and told us to go pick up a B-4 bag and an A-2 leather jacket.

We were given a new leather flight jacket with a pair of cloth wings already sewn on them. Next, they gave us B-4 flight bags with compartments and a handle. Boy, this was great. No more having to use a barracks bag. With the flight jacket on, I began to look like a real flier. We also were given a small travelling bag. Back at the barracks I transferred all my clothes into the new bags, and put all my personal items in a small carrying bag. There was a place for everything in the bag. The B-4 bag bulged on its sides but everything would be kept nice and straight in it. What an improvement over the barracks bag which was nothing more than a big canvas sack with a string to close the mouth.

At noon, we were on a train, heading for Boise, Idaho, carrying our own records and orders. As the train passed through small towns, people stood alongside the tracks, waving to us.

The surrounding landscape was mostly mountains and the ground was rocky. We seemed to be following a river most of the way. I read my orders. They were sending me to Gowen Field at Boise where I would be assigned to the 411th Bomb Squadron (Heavy). I thought I would be staying there a while and I was glad about that.

Very late in the evening, the train conductor came into our coach told us we would be arriving in about an hour. It was early in the morning of July 27, 1943, shortly after midnight. Waiting Army trucks took us straight to the mess hall from the train station. We had a good meal with fruit and everything we could eat. From the mess hall we went straight to a barracks for the night.

At 6 a.m. we were called out of bed. After breakfast we reported to the headquarters building of the 411th Bomb Squadron to be assigned to our permanent barracks and flight crews. An officer took our records and reviewed them, then assigned each of us to the squadron. As we were leaving, he gave us permanent party

passes to be used any time we were free. This was my first permanent party pass. The rank of sergeant truly had its privileges.

The rest of the day was spent moving into our permanent barracks and getting settled in. Several men who were at gunnery school with me were put in the same barracks with me. My next day was free.

## Dinner With the Girls

Percy Adams, a sergeant who had gone to gunnery school with me, asked if I would like to go to town with him. I was all for it. We took off.

In town, we walked all through the place, even out through the residential areas. We felt like birds out of a cage. The city was very neat and clean. The people in the shops were very nice to us. In the residential areas the yards were green. Everything was sprinkled with water. Sprinklers were everywhere. You could tell where the city stopped. From there on, as far as you could see, the earth was brown and rusty, with no greenery. Nothing grew without the water sprinklers.

Percy and I spent the whole day walking through the city from desert to desert.

We stopped to go through every Army store that we came across. We looked at shirts, pants, flight caps and those fifty mission crush flight caps. We both wanted a good looking dress uniform and a flight cap with a bill. We just didn't have the money - but they were nice to look at.

My sergeant's pay had not caught up with me and payday was still a few days away. We both had about enough money to have dinner. I saw a nice hotel and suggested that we try there. "A hotel should have good food," I said.

We went in the hotel and walked up to the front desk. I asked how much a room cost for the night. We both knew we didn't have enough money but the thought of sleeping in a real bed was nice to think about. The room clerk looked at us and replied, "We do not rent rooms to military enlisted personnel." I wanted to punch the guy. We both bit our tongues and walked away. After looking at all the nice uniforms in the stores, I knew Percy and I looked like a couple of rookies, even with the silver wings hanging on us. We walked on into the dining area and sat down at a table.

Several pretty young ladies came into the dining room shortly after we were seated. There were enough seats at their table for all but two of them.

The two young ladies looked at us and came over to our table and asked if they could sit with us. Of course, we both said yes at the same time, trying not to show how eager we were to have them sit at our table.

As we ate, the girls said they were all going to the theater. They asked if we would like to come along. Percy looked at me, knowing we didn't have enough money to take two girls to the theater. I wasn't even sure I had enough to pay for the supper I was eating. I said, "We have to get back to the base."

The girls talked about Boise and the air base and they wanted to know all about us. The dinner passed fast. The girls at the other table finished eating and were getting up to go. The two at our table said they had to go with the other girls and "I wish you would change your minds and go with us," one of them said. "We just can't do it," I said. "We have to be back at the base." One of them bent over and kissed me on the cheek and said, "Maybe we will meet you here again sometime."

Boy! We were feeling good. Having two girls to eat dinner with us was out of this world and I had received a kiss from a very pretty girl.

This was something to talk about. Of course, we would blow the story up when we got back to the barracks and tell everyone about the dinner. Percy asked me, "Why didn't you offer to pay for their dinners?" I said, "Why didn't you? I didn't know if I could pay for supper." Percy said, "I was afraid you were as broke as I was, and scared you'd make them a crazy offer like that."

We walked on toward the base and stopped at a small-ball bowling alley. There were a lot of soldiers and girls bowling. It was late so we left for the base.

The next morning, I slept until 7 o'clock. I thought, "Sleeping late feels good." After mess I went to the headquarters building. Some of us were listed to pack our things. We were shipping out to Pocatello, Idaho to the 536th Bomb Squadron (H). This was a surprise. I thought Boise was going to be home for a while. I was to leave July 31 and I had arrived only four days before.

We were given our records and told to be packed and ready to leave in the morning.

Percy and I went by the post exchange. I bought my wife a pillow case with Boise written on it and mailed it to her. After packing, I wrote Elizabeth a letter, telling her all about having dinner with two girls. I made sure I told it just like it happened. I thought, "Maybe, some day, a letter from Elizabeth will catch up with me." It seemed that it had been forever since I received a letter from her.

This was going to be a long night, wondering about what would be coming up next.

Here I was again on a train, heading for Pocatello. There were twenty-six of us going through the mountains and desert, following a winding river valley and listening to the train whistle as it rounded the curves. We were all pretty quiet, just looking out the windows, watching the scenery pass by. I couldn't help from thinking, "What is next?"

Just before getting to Pocatello, the train passed a beautiful big lake. I looked at it and thought, "Maybe Pocatello will not be too bad a place to be." The train ride had been nice. We had plenty of room in the coaches and plenty of room to walk around while we were travelling. They had served us a box lunch with several good, sweet apricots in it.

It was in the middle of the afternoon when we got off the train. There were *buses* waiting for us. Well, that was something new. We rode in comfort to the airfield, through the gates and to the door of the headquarters building. The officers were very nice to us. They referred to us as fellow fliers and sergeants.

We were told to form a line and count off. An officer said, "I will now assign each of you to a flight crew." This was exciting. We all rushed to line up. As I was getting in line, two soldiers got in the line to my right. The line started counting from the right end. Before the count got to me, another soldier stepped in on my right. He became number thirteen, something I would wonder about in the days ahead.

I was the number fourteen man. "Remember your number," we were told. When my name was called and my records checked, I was told that I was number fourteen and would be on flight crew number 114 of the 536th Bomb Squadron. "That crew is already in operation but they've lost a flight engineer, so you will replace him," an officer told me. "There's a sergeant outside who'll drive you over to their area."

The sergeant in the Jeep drove me across the base to the 536th Bomb Squadron headquarters building. I went inside, into a big office. A second lieutenant walked up to me and said, "Are you

John H. Robinson?" I saluted and said, "Yes, sir." He returned the salute and said, "Sergeant, we won't have to bother with the saluting. You and I are going to be in this thing together. Just call me Wright. Do people call you Robbie?" I smiled. "Yes, sir. They do." He nodded his head. "Good. I will be your pilot."

I was beginning to like this guy already. He must be a pretty good guy, I thought. Wright was about six inches shorter than I was and a little younger. I thought, Well, this Air Force life may turn out okay, after all.

Wright and I walked to the enlisted men's barracks together. He asked all about me and told me he was from Miami, Florida. He asked me if I had been on another air crew or if I was just coming in from school. "I just got out of school," I said. We talked about me being a civilian pilot in single engine aircraft. "How many flying hours do you have?" my new pilot asked me. "A little more than sixty," I said. He nodded. "That might be useful to us, some day," he said. He said he'd try to give me some pilot time in a multi-engine aircraft. "That sounds good to me," I said. We talked all the way to the barracks as we walked along. I sure liked him.

At the barracks I was introduced to the rest of the enlisted crew members. Wright said, "I'll leave you here in good hands. Oh, one other thing: We have a training flight at 0900 tomorrow. You'll meet the rest of the crew on the flight line in the morning. There are four officers and six enlisted men on our crew." He turned and walked out the door. I went out and picked up my bags at the curb. Wright said, "Get a good night's sleep and be ready to go at 0900 tomorrow."

I went back in the barracks and took the only bunk that was empty. There was just this one crew in the barracks.

## My Combat Crew

On the right side of my bunk was a young fellow named Elvin O. Cross. He spoke to me and said, "Make yourself at home. You're going to be here a while." The barracks was large to have only one crew in it. There were other cots but they were all stacked up on one side of the hut.

The other enlisted crew members started introducing themselves. Cross was an armor-gunner and flew in the plane's

ball turret. He was from Denison, Texas and was very friendly. He said to call him E. O.

The next was Marvin E. Tyler, kind of a tall fellow and friendly, but without much to say. He was called "Stinky." He said he flew the right waist position and would be second engineer. He was from Texas.

Kenneth H. Dabbs was next. He wanted to be called Dabbs and was an armorer-gunner. He flew in the cramped tail turret. He was from Texas but, somehow, he looked like a Yankee.

Then, John Van Bogelen, the radio man, from Grandhaven, Michigan. He was friendly but seemed to be a loner. He wanted to be called John.

Next was William E. Cook. I could tell he was a Yankee. He was from Rochester, New York and he acted friendly but I could see he thought I might be some kind of a threat to his position on the crew as first engineer. He was just a typical Yankee. Cook was what he wanted to be called. He quickly informed me that he was the first engineer and would be in charge of all engineering duties. That was all right with me for I would do my job as I saw it needed to be done.

Everyone was very friendly.

During our conversations I asked what happened to the engineer that I was replacing on the crew. Cross said that he was getting sick all the time in flight and Cook had complained so much about him that Wright, their pilot, had asked that he be replaced. I was his replacement. I was third engineer and would fly the left waist gun position.

Cross walked to the quartermaster's with me to get a fatigue flight suit, an oxygen mask, parachute and harness, flight helmet and goggles. Also fleece lined shoes, pants, coat, gloves and two pairs of long handle underwear. I was given a flight bag to keep all the stuff in. Cross helped me lug the load back to the barracks. The rest of the day was spent putting my name and serial number on everything, and trying it all on and learning how it all went together. Everything I had been issued fit me well. Everything seemed to be ready for the next morning's training flight - my first with them.

Late that night, a second lieutenant came to the barracks. He introduced himself as Robert W. Kroll, our co-pilot. He wanted me to call him "Buckey." He was so friendly, happy and mannerly. We talked a few minutes and then he left, saying, "Glad you're aboard, Robbie. See all of you in the morning."



My Crew: Top, Wright, Alexander, Kroll, Wittman;  
Bottom, me, Cook, Dabbs, Van Bogelen, Cross and Tyler.



In my battle station . . .

I felt like he would be a smart, cool head to share the controls of our plane.

I was up early the next morning. Cross and I walked to breakfast together. Everyone was on their own. We got back to the barracks and started dressing out for the training flight. I watched Cross put his flight rig on and followed what he did. First I pulled the long handle underwear over my regular underwear. Then on went the flight fatigues with a notebook and pencil in one pocket. I put on regular socks and then a pair of white socks and a pair of low top black shoes. The flight fatigues really made you look like a flier. They had a silky finish. Next came my light A-2 leather flying jacket and regular Army cap. Everything else went into my flight bag: the heavy shoes, fleece lined jacket and pants, heated shoes, gloves, oxygen mask, parachute harness, throat mike, May West and light weight white silk gloves. Cross said we would pick up our parachutes on the flight line after briefing. A Jeep drove up in front of the barracks and took Cross and me to the flight line. We were the first to get ready.

The others soon arrived at the flight line. I met our officers: Lieutenant Windell Wittman, the bombardier; Lieutenant Robert W. Kroll, the co-pilot whom I had met the night before; Lieutenant Robert T. Alexander, the navigator, and Lieutenant George O. Wright, the pilot. Everyone really looked like flyers.

Lieutenant Wittman was a tall, slender fellow from Pass Christian, Mississippi and a very pleasant fellow. Lieutenant Kroll was of medium height, real jolly and lots of fun. He was from New Jersey. Lieutenant Alexander was a New Yorker and was of medium build, intelligent and very serious about his navigation job.

They had great qualities - and I hoped they would hang onto them.

We were briefed on the weather. We would be flying at 15,000 feet, carrying 2,000 pounds of sand bombs to drop on the target range. We were to try out our guns over the target area.

We all picked up our parachutes. We all wore chest parachutes, except for the pilot and co-pilot who wore seat parachutes. The sergeant who issued the parachutes said, "If it doesn't work, bring it back and get another one." "Do you deliver replacements if this one doesn't work on the way down?" He said, "Sure."

Out at our B-24, Lieutenant Wright assigned me to the left waist gun position and told me to help Cook any way I could. Cook would be top turret gunner and first engineer on take off. Wright

said we would rotate the engineer's duties as we went along and got to know each other better. Cook and I checked over the aircraft. He checked my work on everything. I used the slip stick to determine the location of the center of gravity of the airplane with the load we carried. I initialled the ground crew chief's release form. We all put our flight bags on the airplane.

I saw that Lieutenant Wittman would man the nose turret as well as drop the sand bombs.

Wright, Kroll, Van Bogelen and Cook entered the flight deck. Wittman and Alexander went into the nose compartment. Cross, Tyler, Dabbs and I got into the waist. I walked through the bomb bay to the flight deck and asked Cook if he needed help. He told me to start the put-put (the on-board electrical power generator, driven by a gasoline engine) and turn it off just before takeoff. I crawled into the lower compartment and started the unit.

The engines were started. Number three was first, creating a surge of power that could be felt through the aircraft. The bomber was coming alive. Number one engine was next. Then two and, finally, number four engine roared.

I went back to the left waist window and watched as we taxied out to the edge of the runway. When the aircraft stopped, I went back through the bomb bay and plugged in my headset near the put-put.

Wright told me turn the put-put off. Number three engine was now driving all auxiliary units on board. I hit the switch and confirmed that it was off. Then, back to the left waist window position.

I could see Cook crouched between the pilot and co-pilot on the flight deck as I went through the bomb bay. I plugged in my headset and throat mike at the window and confirmed. Wright acknowledged my report. All other positions then reported to the pilot that they were ready for takeoff. Wright had the intercom on. You could hear him calling off the check list with Kroll, the co-pilot.

The bomber turned onto the runway and lunged forward like a big, mad giant. It was soon off the ground and the wheels came up. I confirmed the left gear as up and locked. Tyler confirmed the right gear as up and locked. Alexander confirmed the nose wheel as up and locked. The flaps soon came up and were confirmed. We were on our way, with mountains to our left and a real big lake out to our right. What a pretty sight.

Wright soon told us to get on oxygen and check our masks. He said he was climbing to 15,000 feet. We were to get to our own

stations and check in with him when we were okay. Very quickly, everyone started confirming okay. I made sure that my parachute was on the floor near me.

To save oxygen, I turned my oxygen regulator to the Demand position so it would give me oxygen only when I needed it. The flight was to be several hours long. We would drop bombs on the range on the way back.

With guns in the waist windows, the window covers had to be removed. The slip stream of air was rushing through the waist area. I was warm but I could feel the cold because we were wearing fleece lined suits, not our heated suits. This was about as high an altitude as we would be training in. Cross and Tyler sat on the floor at the front of the right waist window and leaned on their flight bags and parachutes. Dabbs lay on the floor near the tail turret with his head on his flight bag. I was so interested in the scenery that I stood leaning on my gun, looking out the left waist window.

The crew had been flying together for a while before I was assigned to it but the newness of my presence had already worn off. I was kind of excited about it all. I kept watching the superchargers under the engines glow red and the exhaust leaving them. The smell of gasoline was strong in the waist from the fuel tanks in the wings, even with our oxygen masks on. I discovered that, when I took the oxygen off the Demand position and put it on the Full Oxygen position, I could not smell the fumes any more.

There was such a high noise level in the waist that we could only communicate with sign language, or on the intercom system.

All this was really new to me but I tried to act like I had done all this before. I knew for sure that I was going to get myself a box of some kind to sit on before my next flight. I didn't want to stand leaning on my gun the whole flight. Neither did I want to sit on the floor and be unable to see out the window. I was too interested in everything that was happening around me.

Wright asked Cook for a fuel check and fuel tank balance. Buckey told a few jokes on the intercom. Dabbs would come back on the intercom and try to top it with one of his own jokes.

Wright said, "Cut the chatter."

Lieutenant Alexander, the navigator, gave Wright a flight heading. "We will be over the bomb range in five minutes," he reported. Wittman had the bomb sight in place. He had carried it out to the aircraft with two military police escorting him. He said the bomb sight was working and he was ready.

Wright could see the range in front of us. I stuck my head out the window to look. The wind almost blew it off. I knew better than to do that again. Wright soon told Wittman that the controls were all his. Wittman confirmed. The bomb bay doors opened. Cross and Dabbs had pulled the arming safety wires from the bombs shortly after takeoff. With the bomb bay doors open, the wind blew with gale force through the waist of the plane, even with the compartment door closed.

Wittman called, "Bombs away." We all watched the sand bombs dropping out of the ship. It didn't take them very long to hit the ground. They were just to the right of the center ring on the ground target, but still inside the big rings.

The bomb bay doors closed and Wright took back control of the ship. He told Wittman, "Go back to school and learn how to use the damned sight." Wright said he would make a gunnery pass over the area, and told everybody to get ready to shoot. We all had twenty rounds of ammunition in our guns so there wouldn't be very much shooting.

Wright told us when we were to shoot. We all fired short bursts several times and it was all over. We were not shooting at anything.

Cross called me on the intercom and asked me to pump up the ball turret so he could get out of it. He could get into the turret, close the door and let himself down so he could fire his guns. But he had to have somebody else crank the ball turret up inside the plane so he could get out. I unplugged my intercom wire and put on an oxygen walk-around bottle and pumped the ball turret up into the ship. Cross opened the door and got out. I returned to my position and plugged everything in again.

Wright tuned in some music on the radio and put it on the intercom system so we could all hear it. We had been flying more than three hours. The afternoon sky was beautiful, a blue dome without a cloud anywhere. We began to drop down to lower altitude. It was much warmer. We started taking off our oxygen masks and peeling off some of our heavy clothing. I got out of my heavy coat and pants and put them in my flight bag. I made sure that my machine gun was strapped down in its storage position. I looked out the window, ready to land.

The plane dropped lower and Wright said to take our landing positions. All of us in the waist area went to the bulkhead and sat down with our backs against it. Dabbs lay up against the tail turret even though he was supposed to be up against the middle bulkhead.

The airplane touched the runway, taxied to the ramp and parked. The engines stopped.

I put all my gear in my flight bag and dropped it carefully out the left waist window. Everyone else just threw theirs out. I guess I was afraid I might hurt mine if I threw it out. I was still proud to have flight gear.

We all walked over to a trailer that was being pulled by a tug. We put our parachutes on it. As we walked to operations, we all were talking about the flight. The operations officer already had the results of our bomb drop. He said ten per cent of our bombs landed in the expected target ring. He said it was not good but it was not bad, either. He didn't say much more. Wittman didn't have much to say. He just shook his head. We were told that we would start classes the next day at 10 a.m. The operations officer called them "advanced" classes.

Wittman, with his military escort, had to turn in the bomb sight. We had to wait for the bomb sight to be checked back in before we could return to our barracks. I was getting pretty tired. The flight had made my legs feel like they were not going to hold me up.

The whole crew kept talking about the bomb run on the range. We had thought it was a good bomb drop.

Back at the barracks, after eating supper, I wrote Elizabeth, all about my first flight in a B-24. I was now a true air crew "fly boy." Tomorrow was supposed to be payday. "If I get paid," I wrote Elizabeth, "I will send some of it to you as soon as possible. Maybe this flying will keep me busy so my mind will not be on home all the time." Fatigue and sleep were about to overcome me. I put the letter aside and dropped off to sleep.

The next morning, our routine only required that we make up our cot. We didn't have to clean the barracks. Breakfast would be served until 10 a.m. so we could eat when we wanted to. Then, class at 10 a.m., with the paymaster coming at 3 in the afternoon. That was the day's schedule.

The engineers class turned out to be a course called Advanced Engine Procedures. The armorers went to a shop for more training. Radio men went to an advanced radio school.

We were all to complete a first, second and third flight training phase before we would be assigned to our overseas combat squadron. We were to have classroom work every day that we didn't fly a training mission.

As time passed, we were really getting good as an airborne team. The airplane and crew were our first thoughts while we were flying, or preparing to fly. On the ground, we all did our own thing and didn't have a lot to do with each other.

Cook was quite a loner and didn't say much. I felt that he still thought I was a threat to him. Just a typical Yankee, I thought. Maybe being from the South, I was still fighting the Civil War.

In a few days, Cross and I began to walk around the base with each other more than with the other crew members. I guess Cross and I talked the most with each other because our bunks were side by side. Dabbs, Tyler and Cook wanted to be alone more, preferring to go their own way. Van Bogelen walked around with Cook sometimes.

We all seemed to want to be alone when we could. Maybe we just never got over being a little homesick.

Sometimes, I felt that I didn't want to get to know too much about anyone. That way, if anything happened to them, I wouldn't get so emotional about it. The others felt the same way.

We were learning that, when we were in the aircraft, we had to work together. This feeling grew stronger in us with every flight we made.

During the month of August, we logged more than 72 hours of flying time.

August also brought tragedy to the squadron. Two bombers crashed during training flights, with both crews killed.

Crew number 113 hit a mountain at night.

Crew number 115 crashed and burned on approach to the field during a night landing. It was hard for me to believe that the two crews were wiped out. They were no more.

I knew now that there was some reason that God wanted me to be standing in the 14th position in line when I first arrived at this base.

Another soldier had stepped in line beside me just before the count got to me. This really was on my mind. If I had been number 13 or 15, I would have been killed in one of these crashes.

The month of August was passing fast. We had been in class, or flying, almost every minute. The only one of us who got off the base was Dabbs. He had found a way to get to the highway at the edge of the airfield without going past the guards at the main gate. Dabbs had left the base several times at night that way.

## Small Town With Big Temptations

Dabbs said he knew he was taking a big chance, slipping away from the base, but it was worth it. He had met a girl in Pocatello. "She can't wait to be loved," he said. Dabbs was the sex-crazy one of the crew. I believe he would do anything to get to a female.

I was writing to Elizabeth every night. It was the middle of August before I started receiving her letters regularly. Some had been addressed to Laredo, and some to Boise. I bought her another pillow, this one from Pocatello. I began receiving sergeant's pay and the flight pay bonus on the first of September. I thought I was rolling in money.

After pay day, Cross and I went to Pocatello on our first pass to town. We walked through the gate and out to the highway. A man in a pick up truck gave us a ride to Pocatello. In town, we walked up and down the streets. We stopped at every shop. We even went to the train repair shops and watched them working on trains. There was every kind of steam engine that we had ever seen. Small, big and huge. They were fired on oil. The big engines were used to pull trains through the mountains, we were told.

After the fascination with trains wore off, we walked back through town. There was an Army store that we couldn't stay out of. Cross and I went in and bought a fifty mission crush hat. We got new uniform pants and shirts, with creases that didn't come out. The clerk even sewed stripes on the shirt sleeves for us.

We went into the fitting room and put them on. Boy, were we sharp. Now we looked like fliers for real. We rolled up our old uniforms and put them in a bag. We just had to walk through the town again in our new uniforms.

Our next stop was at a bowling alley. We watched soldiers and their girls bowling. Bowling with a small ball seemed to be the new thing to do. Some of the girls would talk to us. It must have been the new uniforms.

It was now getting dark. We thought we had better get back to the base.

Soon we were walking along the highway, trying to get a ride. Again a pick up truck stopped for us. Riding sure was better than walking, even if it was in a pick up truck. We were almost to the field when the driver said he had to turn off onto a little road. He said he lived up in the mountains to the left, near the base.

Out of the truck and down the highway we went. We could see the field not too far away. The main gate was a good ways down the road. Cross and I decided it would be closer if we cut across the fields to the base instead of going all the way to the main entrance. We could still see dimly in the light of the evening and the base lights that were ahead of us.

Cross and I were talking about our new clothes and the city of Pocatello. I heard his voice. It sounded far way. "Robbie. Robbie. Help me." I suddenly realized that Cross was no longer beside me. I looked around in the darkness and called, "Hey, where are you?" He hollered, "There's a big ditch back here and I stepped down in it. Help me out." I couldn't see him but I could see that he was down in something about fifteen feet deep. "Can you get out?" I asked. "I don't know," he said.

The sides of the pit were sloped and, with some help, Cross got out. We walked on toward the airfield, making sure we didn't step in any more pits. The hole turned out to be a pit where builders got gravel.

We soon reached the fence and got under it, and found our way to the barracks. "We must be idiots to walk through the desert at night. We could have stepped on a snake," I said.

We were now in second phase of flight training and were shooting at towed targets on flights almost every day. Tyler, Cook and I took turns acting as first engineer since we were flying so much.

We were not seeing the officers very much, except when we were flying or on the flight line together. Once in a while, Wright or Buckey would come by the barracks and ask how we were doing. One day, I showed my civilian pilot flight log book to Wright. I told him I tried to go to Cadets and had passed the written test but didn't get before the review board before being shipped out. He said the next time we went up, he would let me fly the plane and would sign and log it in my log.

On the next flight, Wright let me fly the big bomber, and when we came down, he logged it in my book. On the next several flights, he let me simulate landings at an altitude of 5,000 feet, using instruments. Five thousand feet would be considered ground level and I would approach that level from 1,500 feet above it. I would let down flaps and gears, with Wright standing beside me. I was getting pretty good, I thought. I turned and asked Wright, "How am I doing?" He said, "I believe you are now 500 feet into the

ground." I looked at the altimeter and I was 500 feet below the 5,000 foot level.

When the other enlisted crew members found out what I was doing, they complained to Wright that I would kill them. Cook complained the most. A typical Yankee, I thought.

Wright tapered off letting me fly. He let each member of the crew sit in the pilot's seat and fly a little. This seemed to keep everyone satisfied.

The first part of September, we made an air-to-ground gunnery flight. The target was an old airplane parked beside an old house. We would shoot at them as we passed on one side and then turn and shoot at them as we came back. We could see our bullets kick up dirt in the target area.

When we approached the base to land, everyone cleared their guns and quickly put them in safe position for landing. We knew we were going to get a pass to go to town, so we were all in a hurry to get back.

We all got dressed up and met the bus to go to town for the evening. Cook, Cross, Van Bogelen and I met the bus. Tyler and Dabbs were already dressed and left for town right after we landed.

In town, the four of us went to the bowling alley and started playing a few games. Cross and Van Bogelen met a couple of girls and went to a show with them.

Cook and I continued bowling. Two girls about our age came up to us and wanted to bowl with us. One was an Indian girl with long hair and she was very pretty. She took up with Cook and was his partner. The other had brown hair and was not bad looking. We all talked and played several games. The girls told us they worked on the railroad trains nine hours a day, oiling the wheels and cleaning the inside of the coaches. They even cleaned the steam engines.

The girls wanted to take us and show where they worked. Cook said, "We have to get back to the base tonight. Maybe, some other time." The girls walked to the bus with us. Both said they would see us again at the bowling alley, not to forget.

On the way back to camp and the bus, I kept thinking, "What is my wife doing? Will I ever see her again?" It really felt good to talk to a girl. Cook said, "Robbie, would you have a date with her?" I knew what he meant. I was wondering myself if I would be with another woman if I had a chance. I tried to put this thought out of my mind. I just started thinking again about my wife. She was really what I wanted.

"I sure do need her now," I thought.

When Cook and I arrived back at the barracks, there was an officer looking for Cross and Dabbs. We were told to send them to headquarters when they arrived.

It was the next morning before we saw either of them. They went to headquarters and were sent to the provost marshal's office. The story goes, we were told, that Dabbs had left a live shell in his gun when we landed.

The ground armorer had taken the guns out of the aircraft and put them on a flat bed trailer and took them to the armory to be cleaned. The ground armorer picked the guns up and threw them on a table. One of the guns fired. The bullet traveled through a sink and wall, into another building, through a desk and an officer's leg, then through another office where it hit another officer in the leg and stopped outside against a concrete step.

At the hearing, they let Cross off with a stiff warning. They retained Dabbs. After several days of hearings, they dismissed the charge against Dabbs. The ground armorer was charged with failing to properly handle a gun that was in his possession, and was court martialed.

Dabbs had broken the rule by not clearing his gun before he landed. This really did teach Dabbs a lesson. He thought he was facing a court martial, and a prison term. Each gun was traceable to the aircraft from which it came. This taught all of us a lesson.

We never found out what happened to the ground armorer, or if the two officers hit in the leg recovered properly.

We started flying almost every evening on training missions. We came back late at night.

The flights began to get longer. We were on oxygen at altitude, more and more.

Lieutenant Wright came in the barracks early in the morning and asked me if I was still interested in becoming a pilot. He said the base was giving a written examination that day. "If you want to, go over and sign up," he said.

I rushed to headquarters and signed up. The colonel said I must have some papers signed by my pilot saying he would release me from my crew if I passed the examination.

I ran to the officers quarters and found Wright. He said, "If this is what you want to do, I'll sign them." I handed him the papers to sign and he signed them and said, "Good luck."

Back to the headquarters I ran and gave the papers to the colonel. I was put on the list to take the test the next day. I showed

the colonel where I had passed the test at Keesler. I had kept the record. But he said, "Sorry, you'll have to take it again."

I was up early the next day. I got to the testing building and had to wait. Everyone finally showed up and it took more than three hours to take the test. I really felt good about it. I thought it was much easier than the last time. It was also different than the test at Keesler.

I spent the rest of the day around the barracks, just thinking and wondering if I had passed the test. I thought, "What would I say if I failed it?" Cross walked with me over to the post exchange. He asked, "Do you think you passed. Robbie?" I said, "I don't know." We came back to the barracks after looking around the post exchange. We played Black Jack a while and went to bed.

The next day, Wright came by the barracks and asked me if I had seen the bulletin board. He said the results of the test had been posted. He wouldn't tell me the results. "Go see for yourself," he said.

## Leading Girls to the Mountain Top

All the way to headquarters, I was sure that I had failed the test. Wright wouldn't tell me the results. I got to the bulletin board and there it was: Robinson, John H., 34496440. I had passed the Cadet test. The bulletin said the men who had passed would be given a physical exam and then transferred to the training center in Nashville, Tennessee.

Boy! Was I happy. I thought, "Now I have a chance to be an Air Force pilot and Nashville will be almost back home."

We were given the next two days off. Cross wanted to go horseback riding in the mountains. That sounded good, so off we went.

On the way, I said, "Where are we going to get the horses?" He said he had seen a sign on the way to Pocatello that advertised horse riding. We got on the bus at the gate and rode it until we saw the sign and then we got off.

We walked up to a house and barn. There were several people there. We asked the owner if we could rent some horses to ride up into the mountains. He said, "Yes, if you will ride along with the three young ladies over there. They want to go, too." We

didn't have to think long about that. We both said yes at the same time.

I tried to act like an old pro around the horses. Cross and I picked out the ones we wanted to ride and mounted them. The girls were already on their horses and waiting to go. The horses knew what to do better than we did. The owner gave us some last minute instructions. "They'll take you to the top of the mountain and get you back to the barn before dark," he said. "They know the way and they won't take you off the path."

The owner said to get off the the horses when they stopped on the path. He said they would not walk across loose rock with someone on their backs. "Just walk beside them until they have crossed the rocks, then get back on," he said. "They'll stop and wait for you to get on."

It sounded a little fishy to me.

The three girls were already on the path and waiting for us to catch up. We started up the trail in single file with the girls out in front, swaying on their horses.

The path was steadily climbing. Soon you could look behind you and see the complete airfield. The three girls kept to themselves for a long time and we followed behind them.

The path began to get wider and flatten out. The girls dropped back and began to ride beside us. They started talking to us. We learned that they were in their last year of high school and lived in Pocatello. They told us they had ridden horses up this mountain many times.

As the path became narrow again, we got back in single file. The path was really going up. The air was getting thinner. It was getting hard to breathe.

The horses came to a stop. I said, "I guess this is where we walk." We all got off the horses and walked beside them. There was loose shale in the path for a long ways. I thought, "The horses are smarter than I am because I can hardly stand up on these loose rocks." After the horses had passed the loose rock, they stopped and let us climb back on their backs. "They call them dumb animals?" I said.

As the horses walked up the path, all in a line, they started letting air from there hind ends. It sounded almost in harmony, at times. It kind of embarrassed us but it was happening so much that we stopped paying attention to it. In fact, I was being affected the same way and trying to be quiet about it.

The thin mountain air was getting to all of us, as the path became steeper. The horses walked very slowly up the narrow path to reach the very top of the mountain.

At the top was a large flat rock area. We all got off the horses and sat on the rock. It had been more than 2 hours getting to the top, and I was glad to sit on something that wasn't going up and down. I believe the rocks were softer than the horses.

The wind was blowing hard in our faces as we sat looking out over the valley. The sight was beautiful. It made the trip to the top of the mountain worth making. It was like seeing the world in front of you. We all sat at the top for some time, talking and looking. The girls would tell us what we were looking at in the distance. You could see the complete air base just as if you were in an airplane flying over it.

We had to hold the horses to keep them from trying to go back down the path. I was thinking that it would not take as long to go down the path as it did to come up. The horses wanted to go, so we finally had to let them. We all mounted and started down. The horses were really taking their time going down. Every step they took was sure. It was impossible to make them go any faster. They knew exactly where they were stepping.

When we got back to the loose rock, they stopped again. We had to get off. They walked carefully across the loose rock and stopped on the other side. We walked a little further before we got back on. I began to feel the ride in my back and legs. The girls were getting more friendly and talkative as we rode on. We stopped and drank water from a little spring. It was the first drink we had all morning, and it was good and cold.

The horses knew when they were getting near their barn and they started walking faster.

Back at the barn, the girls thanked us for riding to the top of the mountain with them. Cross and I said they had made it a very pleasant day. One of the girls came up to Cross and kissed him on the cheek and then walked over and kissed me. The other two did the same thing, and then said goodbye. "We come out here about every 2 weeks at the same time," one of them said.

Both of us were a little embarrassed when the girls kissed us for it was a real surprise. They had been so shy on the trip.

Those kisses had made our day.

Both Cross and I were getting so sore that we could hardly walk. We returned to the highway and got a ride to the base gate.

Back at the barracks, we took a shower, went to eat, and then straight to the bunk and fell asleep.

The next morning, all we could talk about was our horseback ride with three pretty girls. Everyone on the crew was listening to our story and we were really blowing it up. I told Cross that if we ever went there again, we were going to take food and drinks. The ride had been more than six hours.

The next week was all work and flying. We had made several night flights of more than five hours at high altitude. We had flown so often that we were beginning to recognize the terrain in the whole western part of the country, at night as well as day.

We had flown down the Grand Canyon, over Sun Valley, down the Snake River, and even over San Francisco, California. There was no place in the West that we hadn't flown over, I thought. We had simulated dropping bombs everywhere in the West. Air Force fighter planes had simulated attacks on us.

On one of the night flights, we had to drop bombs on a target. Before, we had always made our drops in the daytime. The stars were all out and shining bright and it was a beautiful night to fly. We were loaded with ten 100-pound sand bombs.

On the intercom, Alexander told us we were approaching the bomb range. On the ground below, I could see a ring of lights and a line of lights through the middle of the ring. There was one bright light in the center. We were at high altitude and everything looked small on the ground. I thought the circle of lights looked awfully small for a bomb target. Lieutenant Wittman picked out the circle of lights in the bomb sight and released the sand bombs. The bombs in the front part of the bomb bay fell out first, then the bombs in the rear of the bomb bay fell. Wright closed the bomb bay doors and we watched the bombs fall and hit. The first group fell through the middle of the target. The last group fell beyond the light ring, due to a delay in leaving the bomb bay. We thought our bombs had hit pretty well in the target area.

After landing back at the airfield, we went straight to briefing. The operations officer was waiting for us. There were several other officers waiting for us, as well. We were informed that we had dropped bombs on and around the community of American Falls, near a big dam.

One of the bombs had hit inside the town but, luckily, caused no great damage. The others all fell in the lake. This was a real surprise to us.

The next night, several flights were sent out to confirm that the lights and signals at the dam, from altitude, did look almost like the bomb range lights only a few miles away. In fact, at night, the town of American Falls easily could be mistaken for the bombing range.

We were given a verbal reprimand. That was the last we heard about it. They changed the night lights at the bomb range so it would not be confused for American Falls at night.

Thank God, it happened late at night, and no one in American Falls was hurt. The bombs were all filled with sand, with only a little explosive in them, but they easily could have killed someone or caused serious damage.

In a few days, my name appeared on the bulletin board with orders to report for a physical examination for the Cadets. When I took the physical, they said I was five pounds underweight and would have to get the colonel to sign a waiver about my weight. The colonel signed and I was ready to face the review board. I met with the board the next day. Everything went well. I was told that orders would be cut for me in a few days, moving me to Nashville. A replacement would be found to take my place on my flight crew.

Now that all was ready for the Cadets, I began having some reservation about leaving the fellows on my air crew. We had flown together for quite a while and I liked them. I still wanted to go to Cadets, however, and for the first time everything was working out.

We were up and in the air early the next morning. The flight was going to be more than six hours. After flying all around the country, we returned in the early evening, taxied to the ramp and walked to operations.

Wright was told that we were to get packed and be on a train the first thing in the morning. The train would leave the station at 6 a.m. We were being transferred to Sioux City, Iowa. Wright's crew had been picked because we had the best bomb hit record and we had more flying time than the other crews.

I ran to headquarters as fast as I could.

I arrived out of breath and asked to see the colonel. The officer said, "The colonel is off the base, sergeant, and will not be back until tomorrow about noon." I told him my problem. There was nothing he could do. He said he would leave a note and see that the colonel got it. "In the meantime, you'll have to follow your shipping orders, unless something else turns up."

I returned to my barracks with a sick feeling in my stomach. I talked to Wright but he said there was nothing he knew to do, that he had already talked to the operations officer about it.

We all went to the mess hall together. We were all talking and wondering about this Sioux City transfer. When I got back to the barracks, I wrote Elizabeth, telling her about everything and what was happening. I put half of the money I had in a letter, and wrapped my civilian pilot log, the one in which Wright had recorded my B-24 flying time in. I mailed it all to Elizabeth. On the way back to the barracks, I saw a telephone booth. I couldn't resist. I was down in the dumps. I knew it would cost a lot of money and I might not be able to get a line through.

I gave it a try. The first time, I got through. Elizabeth answered the phone. I almost fainted when I heard her voice. I couldn't help telling her all of my troubles. Elizabeth said she was just getting in bed and was writing me a letter. We talked on and on. I just couldn't let her go. Neither of us wanted to hang up. After two hours of talking on the phone, I told her that I would send her an address as soon as I could, if I stayed long in Sioux City. We finally had to say goodbye. I knew that we would owe the phone company more money than we had.

I was really down in the dumps when I hung up. I missed my angel so very much. Her voice was wonderful and soft to hear. I could almost feel her near me. I walked back to the barracks with nothing on my mind but Elizabeth.

## Jimmy Stewart - Our Mystery Commander

We were all up early the next morning. For me, it was a sleepless night. This was September 20, 1943. Everything was packed and ready to go. We all went to eat together and returned to the barracks as quickly as possible. The Jeeps picked us up at 5 a.m. and we were on the train at 6. I asked Wright again if he had found out anything about Cadets. He said, "Maybe we can do something when we get to Sioux City." The train wasted no time in getting there. We arrived late in the evening. I must have slept most of the way. I could only remember eating a box lunch and watching the scenery go by the window.

In Sioux City, we were taken immediately to the air base, to an empty barracks, and then to the mess hall. We were to report to

the operations headquarters on the flight line the next morning at about 7. When we got back to the barracks, the cots were already made up and ready for us. Our baggage was sitting on the floor beside our cots. Someone had really fixed the place up while we were at the mess hall. We were not used to this kind of service.

We all met at headquarters on the flight line at 7 a.m. Our officers were already there when we arrived. Wright went into a small office and we all followed him in. The small office was full, with all of us crowded in it.

The lanky captain sitting at the desk looked familiar, for some reason. He said, "Well, fellows, we are sure glad to see you guys. Glad you're here with us." Rubbing one side and his chin, he said, "You know - You fellows are - uh - replacing one of our fine crews that hit a water tank on landing approach last week." He looked at us and thought for a minute and said, "You fellows will just have to be more careful, you know."

The rail of a captain stood up and thought a minute. Then he said, "Have you fellows been home lately? To see your folks, I mean?"

Everyone said, at one time, a loud, "NO."

"Well, now," said the captain, with a crooked smile, "How about going on a furlough? Say, for five days or so. Starting about right now." He scratched his chin. "The sergeant, here, will get you your papers. That's all, and you fellow have a good time."

We all saluted him as he sat back down. He lazily returned the salute and returned to his paper work. Seeing we were still standing there smiling at him, a little unbelieving, he smiled and said, "Okay, fellows. That'll be all."

We stepped outside.

Seemed like a nice guy, I thought, wondering where I had seen him before, or was it just my imagination?

We stood outside the captain's office, waiting for his sergeant to get our furlough papers ready. We were happy as we could be about getting to go home. We could hardly believe our new captain.

I said to Wright, "That guy sure does look familiar."

Wright smiled. "Of course. That's Captain Stewart." I didn't make any connections and I walked away, still wondering where had I seen the guy before. I couldn't remember running into any Captain Stewart any place. But I had the feeling I had seen this guy somewhere before.

I was thinking about Elizabeth. How great this was going to be.

The sergeant came up and handed a stack of furlough papers to Wright. Wright handed each of us our papers and said, "See you later. Be careful and get back on time." I didn't wait for anyone else. I rushed back to the barracks, packed away all my other stuff in my foot locker and took off for the transportation office. The whole thing was still wonderfully unbelievable.

The officer at the transportation office fixed me up with a train from Sioux City to Chicago and a Chicago Southern air flight to Memphis. He said, "If you can make it to the train station within the next hour, you will have it made. Do you need any money?" I said, "Yes." He called the finance office and made arrangements for me to be paid. He said, "The sergeant, here, will take you over there. They will have your money ready for you by the time you get there."

Off we went in the Jeep. My money was ready and waiting, just as the officer had said it would be. Back in the Jeep and to the train station in plenty of time. All of this had happened since 7 a.m. I didn't think anything could happen this fast in the Army. The train was about five minutes late in leaving Sioux City. The military police looked at my furlough papers as I boarded the train and said, "Captain Stewart's outfit. Right, sergeant?" It was now a little before 9 a.m. I was supposed to be on an airplane in Chicago at 1900 hours. I didn't think it was possible. The conductor told me, "We'll be there. Don't worry about it."

This was an impossible dream coming true - on my way to see my wife. Thanks to the new captain.

The train was full of people. There were more civilians than soldiers. I didn't see another soldier with wings anywhere. I walked up and down most of the train, just looking around.

The train was really picking up speed. Maybe the conductor was right. I sat down in my coach seat and looked out the window. I had never been on a train going so fast. The coaches were swinging from side to side. I saw the conductor and asked how fast we are going. He said, "We are doing over a hundred miles hour." "I didn't know a train could go that fast," I said. "This one does," he said.

It was time for lunch and the porter came through, announcing that the dining car was now open. I walked back. All the tables were full. An older man and his lady asked if I would like to sit with them. I thanked them and sat at their table. We talked all

through lunch. When I started to leave and pay the check, the man said, "Please, let me pay for your lunch." I thanked him. He said, "We have a son in the Army and you remind us of him. We would be honored if you would let us pay for it." Again I thanked him and told them goodbye. I was very flattered.

The train was still making great time. I wondered if the engineer knew that I wanted to get home quick.

I didn't know where the other crew members went when we got our furlough papers. Everyone really scattered. All were on there way home by now, I was sure.

I was on pins and needles. The train was going to arrive about twenty minutes late in Chicago. I just knew that I was going to miss my airplane connection. I had to get to the airport from the train station and get my ticket. The airline said they were saving me a ticket. When I gave the airline clerk my furlough number, she had given me a priority number. She said the airline would take care of everything. I could pay for the ticket when I got to Chicago.

The train finally pulled into the Chicago station. I got my bag and was the first person off the train. I ran down the platform as fast as I could. I found myself in the biggest train station I had ever seen. I asked a conductor where the telephones were. He pointed in their direction. I soon found them. The phone had so many numbers and letters on the dial that I didn't know what to do. I put some money in the phone and dialed the operator. I said, "Operator, I'm just a country boy and I don't know how to use this kind of phone. Please, mam, would you get me someone at Chicago Southern. I have to get home quick. I'm afraid the plane has already left me."

The next thing I heard on the phone was, "Chicago Southern Airlines. Can I help you?" I told her my name real quick and my furlough number. She said, "Sergeant Robinson, we are waiting for you. Get here as fast as you can. Take a taxi. We knew your train was a little late getting to Chicago." I said, "Thanks. I'm on my way."

I found a cab driver and told him my story. He said, "We will be there in a minute." I really had to close my eyes, the way the cab driver was driving. I believe he really went up on the sidewalk in some places to get around traffic. I paid him before we got to the airport terminal. I jumped out of the cab and ran to the ticket counter. The agent looked at my furlough papers and said, "Sergeant Robinson, you can board and pay the stewardess on the airplane. She has your ticket. Have a nice trip."

I rushed down the hall and out the door. There was the airplane. I ran up the steps on the plane and asked, "Is this plane going to Memphis?" The stewardess said, "Yes. You must be Sergeant Robinson. Sit in the little jump seat in the front of the cabin. I'll tell the pilot you're aboard."

The door of the plane closed and the engines started. The airplane was full of people. The stewardess came and sat beside me when the airplane took off. When we got into the air and leveled off, she asked to see my furlough papers. I took them out and gave them to her.

She looked at my papers, took a ticket out of her pocket, and told me how much I owed her. As I was paying her, she said, "I sure wish I had that signature - the one on the bottom of your furlough." I thought for a minute and said, "What signature is that?" She said, "Why, Jimmy Stewart's, of course."

I tried not to look too surprised. "Oh, that signature. Yea, I wish I could give it to you but I can't. I have to use these orders to get back."

A light slowly came on in my head. Now it dawned on me where I had seen that captain sitting behind the desk, the one who gave us all a furlough home.

"Yea," I said proudly. "He's my squadron commander. Yea, Jimmy Stewart's my commander."

Now I really had something to talk about when I got home to Memphis.

I wondered what would happen next.

The airplane soon landed in St Louis. Several people got off. I was given a regular passenger seat. In about an hour, the plane took off for Memphis. I sat there thinking about being in the command of a real movie star. The airplane trip took five hours to get to Memphis, from Chicago. I could hardly wait to get home.

It was after midnight when we landed. The old Memphis airport sure did look good. I called Elizabeth from the airport. She had been asleep. "I'll be home in a few minutes," I said. She couldn't believe that I was at the airport in Memphis.

I ran out of the terminal and found a cab, and was on my way home. The cab driver talked all the way to my house. He wanted to know all about the Air Force. We finally reached the street that my home was on. Elizabeth had turned on the porch light. I told the driver to stop where the light was on.

I saw Elizabeth standing in the door, wearing a thin blue satin robe. The blond hair was down around her shoulders. She was the prettiest thing that I had ever laid my eyes on.

All I could think was, "This angel belongs to me."

I jumped from the cab before it stopped, ran up to her and held her in my arms, hugging and kissing. She was the warmest, firmest, softest, and most wonderful thing in the world. Tears were running down both of our cheeks, we were so happy.

I was brought back to earth by a horn blowing. I turned and the cab was still there. I ran back, paid the driver and got my bag. "I'm sorry I held you up," I said. "That's okay, soldier. I have never seen anyone so much in love. You make a wonderful couple. Have a great time with your wife. I wish you all the happiness in the world, and God bless you." I thanked him for his kind words, and he drove off. I ran back to my wife, and we walked into the house in each other's arms.

The phone was ringing. It was the next morning. We had been in each other's arms all night, even in our sleep. Our love was truly made in heaven. We were but one person, together. The phone kept ringing. I answered it after fumbling around sleepily for it from the bed.

The voice on the other end of the phone was my aunt's. She was surprised to hear me and to know that I was at home. She wanted us for supper that evening. I told her that we would be there, that I loved her and would see her before supper.

Elizabeth and I had not even thought about food. Our love for each other was enough. The evening came quicker than we wanted it to. We only wanted to be alone. I had promised that we would be there so we drove in to my aunt's house, and had dinner. Even at dinner, Elizabeth and I held onto each other, sitting at the table, holding hands.

The next few days passed so very fast. We walked through the park and around the lake, holding hands, really not saying much to each other. It was as though our minds knew what each of us was thinking. We both knew that this would come to an end soon, and we would part.

As we walked through the park, a stranger asked if he could take a picture of Elizabeth and me together. He said we looked as if we belonged together and he would like a picture of us by the lake. We were flattered by a stranger's remarks. He took our picture by the lake and wished us happiness and good luck. He said, "God

bless you, young flier," referring to my silver wings. "God bless you both."

I would have to leave the next morning. Elizabeth asked if she could fly back with me and return to Memphis on the next flight. I tried to make arrangements for her to fly all the way to Sioux City but I could only get her a ticket as far as St Louis. She wanted to go at least that far. We would be together a few hours longer. Elizabeth wanted to be as close to me for as long as she could, so to St. Louis it was.

We boarded the airplane to St. Louis, the next day at 11 a.m., and arrived in St. Louis in a short two hours. We sat beside each other, holding hands, unable to say very much to each other. Elizabeth's return flight would be leaving in only one hour. We sat in the terminal until her flight was called, holding each other. I soon was standing, waving goodbye as she walked up the stairs to the airplane. The light blue suit and her yellow blond hair made her look like my angel. I didn't know when I would ever see her again.

When my plane arrived in Kansas City, the weather was very bad. It

was raining heavily. There was a delay in my flight to Omaha, Nebraska. While I was waiting, I tried to call Memphis to see if Elizabeth had returned. I couldn't get a line through to her. I

After a long wait, the flight to Omaha was finally ready to go. The weather was as bad as it could get. Rain was coming down in sheets.

In Omaha I found out that I had a problem. All flights had been canceled until noon the next day. This was a mess. I had used up all my travel time. After midnight I would be away from my base without leave. From what I understood of Army discipline in war time, I knew I had better be back on time. I only had two hours left to get there.

I didn't know what to do now. The airline attendant had no suggestions. I walked all around the airport terminal, trying to think up a solution. I met a taxi driver and told him my story. He said he would be on his own time shortly. For 150 dollars he would take me to the air base in Sioux City. That night. Another man heard me talking to the driver and he called me to one side. He said, "Don't let him stick you like that. I'm going that way and I'll take you for fifty dollars." I had a little less than seventy-five dollars in my pocket. I said, "Lets go, I have to be there tonight."

It rained all the way. Sometimes you couldn't even see the road in front of you. He took me right up to the gate of the air base.

It was now well after midnight but I was there. I paid him and thanked him for getting me there through all the rain. Only with God's help did we make it on those roads through all that rain.

The military police at the gate looked at my papers. The rain was pouring down on us. One of them said, "I'm going by your barracks in the Jeep in a minute. You can wait and ride with me." The Jeep had a cover over it but the rain came through it. The military policeman let me out in front of my barracks. I was the only one there. No one else on the crew had returned.

The other members of the crew began to arrive by noon the next day. Everyone was back by nightfall except Dabbs. It was late the next day before Dabbs arrived. We had been scheduled to fly that day but the mission was postponed because we had not all returned.

When Dabbs did arrive, Wright was waiting for him and gave him a verbal lashing. Wright had to make a full report, giving satisfactory reasons for Dabbs being off the air base without leave.

On October 1, our training flights started. Every day for the next eight days, we did nothing but fly, drop sand bombs, and shoot our guns. The routine was: get up at 6 a.m., shower, shave, make up the bunk, go to the mess hall, go down to the flight line for briefing, preflight the aircraft, put your flight gear on board, load ammunition, and all the other little things that it took to get ready to fly. It was all getting to be plain work.

Cook began asking Tyler and me to help him as much as we could or would. He even wanted us to take turns flying first engineer. Wittman was getting the bomb sight so much that the military police had quit escorting him. The bomb sight was supposed to be super secret and protected at all times.

Captain Stewart would brief us before every flight. Stewart, as we began to know him, flight checked us twice in the next eight days.

Stewart always had to wait for us to get to the flight line before every flight. He would always be there first. Somehow, Wright was always late getting to the briefing. This bugged Stewart and he started calling us, "That damned Lieutenant Wright's crew."

We were good. We always did our job well when we were on the aircraft and in the air. Stewart thought so, too, and he often told us we were a good crew.

A couple of our crew officers, and Dabbs were always late to almost every meeting that we had to attend. Wright, Alexander,

and Dabbs were going to get there a few minutes after the meeting started. You could bet on it.

## Jimmy Stewart Gives Us Holy Hell

Every time a briefing began, just as the speaker would rise and go to the board and start talking, some member of our crew would come in late. They tried to be quiet but they always made some kind of bothersome little noise.

Stewart would put up his hand and stop the meeting. He would stand up and say, "Now fellows, I just can't understand why, when we set a briefing at 0800 hours, that - that everybody on Wright's crew, here, can't get here on time. I - Uh - Even when I set the briefing an hour later, at 0900 hours, Wright's damned crew just can't seem to get here on time." He would shake his head and scratch his chin and look puzzled. "I just don't know how we are going to win this dang war."

The briefing officer would wait until Stewart appeared to be finished, and then he would rise and the briefing would resume.

Even though, sometimes, it wasn't Wright's crew that was coming in late, Stewart liked to use us as the example.

We were flying and shooting our .50 caliber machine guns at towed targets like ammunition was going out of style. Air-to-ground runs. High altitude, and low altitude bomb runs. We were using all the skills in this eight days of flying that we had learned in school. But I had not forgotten about the Cadets.

I caught Captain Stewart in his office on the fourth day after I returned from the furlough.

"What can I do for you, Sergeant Robinson?" he said.

I told him how I had been trying to get into Cadets all this time and how bad timing kept ruining things for me.

He picked up one of the papers I had brought in to show him.

"Sir, that's a copy of the notice that was posted in Pocatello that said I had passed the tests and would be shipping out to Nashville."

I pulled out one of the sheets from the stack. "Captain, this one shows where I took the physical exam and passed it."

"You mean you were waiting for travel orders when they shipped you out to Sioux City?" Stewart said.

"Yes, sir. That wasn't the only time that happened, either."

He looked at me, troubled, and said, "Gosh, sergeant. You know we don't have a Cadet board here at this base. We don't have anything like that here. Uh - Honestly, I don't think I can do anything whatever. I wish I could. But there's this timing problem, sergeant. You know, we are in third phase flight training. We're all supposed to be going overseas very soon now."

"Yes, sir, I know," I said. I saluted him and thanked him for his time. He returned the salute and said, "Sergeant. I am just sorry that I can't help some way. I wish you good luck."

"Thank you, sir." I walked on out to the aircraft, kind of feeling sorry for myself.

Then it hit me. Stewart had said we were "going overseas very soon now."

Now I had something else to worry about.

That night, when everybody was back in the barracks, I mentioned that I had talked to Captain Stewart about my chances of getting into Cadets. "What Stewart said was, we're all in the third phase of our flight training and we are going overseas very soon."

Nobody believed it. They said we were only in the second phase of training. We still had lots of time left before we would be sent overseas.

"You mean, Captain Stewart doesn't know what he's talking about?" I said.

"Robbie, I'm telling you, we're in the second phase," one of the guys said, closing the argument.

Two day later, they all found out that they were wrong. Stewart and the colonel called a briefing and told everyone that we would leave for overseas on October 8, 1943. The ground crew of the 703rd Squadron would ship out the day before us. Each flight crew was taking their ground crew chief and three other passengers with them on the airplane.

This was beginning to sound like the real thing. We all were getting pretty serious about it.

All the flight crews of the 703rd were given a pass to go to town on the night of October 6.

We all dressed up in our Sunday best uniform, put on our fifty mission crush hats, and thought we really looked like sharp Air Force crewmen.

We all went to town together. When we got to town we broke up in groups. No one knew what he wanted to do. We felt a bit uncertain. So, guys went their own ways. Cross, Tyler, and I

walked around and found the Rathskeller, a restaurant and bar in the basement of a building on Main Street. We went in and about half of the crews of the 703 Squadron were there.

The food was great but there were just too many soldiers jammed in the place that night. People were singing and having a good time. Someone got up on the bar and recited a happy but sentimental farewell to the 703rd Squadron, to all "the brave lads going overseas in a couple of days."

Everyone was in a real noisy state of mind. It was almost a military stag party. The officers and enlisted men of the 703rd had taken over the place. It wasn't long before someone made up a song about Jimmy Stewart being the best squadron commander in the world. Then there was another noisy toast, made to the brave men of the 703rd. Squadron who were "leaving for overseas with Jimmy Stewart, the best damned squadron commander in the world." Several others gave a toast to Stewart.

The party was getting a little out of hand. Everyone was having a good time, singing and toasting their sorrows and fears away.

Cross and I thought it was about time we got out of there. We pushed our way through the mob and finally got out the door.

As we walked out the door, we noticed a small neon sign blinking over the door that said, Officers And Dogs Not Allowed. The sign was about two feet long, in red neon and hanging on two little chains.

We thought this was a switch from the usual sign. Most real nice places had signs saying, Officers Only. This place was full of both officers and enlisted men and everyone was happy about it. Sioux City businesses seemed to welcome all of us on the air crews. Silver wings seemed to get you in anywhere, and everyone was nice to you.

Cross and I walked around town for a while and then returned to the base. It was late in the night when Dabbs returned to the barracks and woke all of us up. Dabbs wanted to show everyone his new toy. He had disconnected the neon sign that had been hanging over the entrance at Rathskeller restaurant. Dabbs plugged the sign into an electrical outlet and it started blinking, Officers And Dogs Not Allowed.

"Dabbs," I said, "what the hell are you going to do with that sign?" "I am going to take it overseas with me," he said. He wrapped a blanket around it and went out of the barracks saying, "I am going down to the flight line and put it in the airplane."

On the morning of October 8, we took our bags to the bomber and loaded up. Cook and I went through the preflight procedures of the airplane. The briefing was held in front of the operations building on the flight line.

Everyone in the squadron was standing around Captain Stewart and Colonel Terrill. There were several other officers there who were not familiar. We were told to return to our aircraft. Our destination would be Lincoln, Nebraska. We would be taking off at five-minute intervals.

We returned to the aircraft, started engines and waited for our turn to lift off. As we left the ground, we all said goodbye to Sioux City.

It was only a short flight to Lincoln. Upon landing, we were directed to taxi to an area away from all the other aircraft. An officer came to tell us not to take anything out of the aircraft, that we would spend the night in Lincoln, and return to Sioux City the next morning.

"Your overseas orders have been cancelled," he said.

We were stunned. What had gone wrong? Cook and I stayed with the ship most of the night. In the morning, we were back at the airplane after a sleepless night, wondering what was going on.

Our return flight to Sioux City took less than two hours. There was little talking. Everyone was subdued. Wright looked grim as he sat the ship down and taxied to the ramp. Everyone was standing around outside of operations. We all waited around. After all the air crews had arrived, Captain Stewart and Colonel Terrill came out of the office. Colonel Terrill's face looked frozen. Stewart didn't look happy.

Stewart said, "Now, dadgum it, fellows! I want to know who was doing all the partying at that Rathskeller's bar in Sioux City. I know it was some of you because most of the ground personnel had already shipped out. The others were restricted to base."

Everyone was very quiet. Stewart said, "Can you believe that we were under the strictest of secret orders from the War Department to go overseas. No one outside of this base was to know the date, who was involved or anything else about it. Yet, in a public place, you had a farewell party for the 703rd. Squadron, even giving the name of your squadron commander. Fellows, I wasn't even there. So this move wasn't very *secret*, was it?"

Stewart continued, "Now fellows, the next ten days will be the roughest that you will ever have in your life. We don't have any ground crew here to help us. But you will have to fly every day to make up for your - uh - your training deficiencies. Our ground crew has already gone on ahead. You men will have to service your own ships. It's up to you to keep them flying. You will do everything by the numbers. Well, now. You are just going to have to buckle down and do your best for the next ten days. We will do it all ourselves." Stewart shook his head and said, "Dismissed."

We all saluted and looked like we had been spanked.

We walked back to our bomber and got our personal gear. We all felt like Stewart had put on a performance for the colonel's benefit. We settled into our old barracks, put the cots back up and found a few blankets.

We soon found out that Stewart had meant every word he said. We flew every day, watched our own airplanes at night, serviced our own ships, worked on our own engines at night and pulled full aircraft inspections. Cook, Tyler, the ground crew chief, and I made up the mechanical crew. This was a real change for us, having to do this kind of work and fly the plane, too, but we handled it.

We were given 2,800 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition to shoot on a single training flight. It took all of us to load it on the aircraft. Even the officers helped load all the ammunition on board.

The mission was to shoot every bit of the ammunition at a towed target. We would shred it. We took off early to find the tow airplane and get rid of the ammunition. After about an hour of flying around, looking in vain for the towed target, Wright said, "We'll have to give it up. I don't know where it is. We'll make some ground passes on the range." We went down to lower level and fired as much as we could on each pass across the range. After a number of passes, we still had ammunition stacked up all around us. Wright was getting disgusted because we couldn't shoot it all up.

Wright came up with a good idea. We were approaching the Missouri River at low level. Down the river we flew, no more than a hundred feet above it. Wright said on the intercom, "Find something to do with that damned ammunition."

Dabbs opened the camera hatch. Out dropped boxes of ammunition, one after another. The river was dotted with a line of white splashes as the ammunition boxes hit the water. When we returned to base, all our ammunition boxes were gone.

On the fourth day, a soldier walked up behind me while I was working on the airplane and said, "Hello, Harold." No one here called me Harold. Everyone called me Robbie. I turned and looked. I couldn't believe it, but there stood my cousin's husband from Memphis, Shorty Addison. I looked at him and said, "How in the world did you find me? How did you get on this flight line?"

"No problem at all," he said smoothly, with a smile. Shorty, a gracious little guy, had been the assistant manager of the hotel where I worked as chief engineer. He was passing through Sioux City on an airplane, he said, going to Dyersburg, Tennessee. They were refueling so he would be around for a little while.

I introduced him to the guys on my crew. I told Shorty that we were going to make a training flight in a few minutes. If he wanted to go with us he could. The training flight would last about three hours. Shorty said his airplane would leave before we got back. He helped us load the airplane and stayed on the flight line until we took off.

We talked about old times together at the hotel. We really had some tales to talk about.

## Jimmy Stewart Checks Us In Flight

We were given two check flights. Captain Stewart flew with us as the command pilot on each flight. Stewart asked each of us about everything that he could think of on the airplane. He would ask each of us something about the airplane every few minutes, to see if we were on the ball and doing our job.

Time was passing fast. Soon we were told that we would return to Lincoln, Nebraska on October 31.

On the day before we were to leave, Jimmy Stewart walked into our barracks. We were all fooling around. Cross, Tyler, and I saw him coming and we jumped out of our cots and acted like we were trying to clean up the barracks.

Stewart said, "Fellows, we have got to leave this barracks good and clean when we leave here this time." He picked up a broom and started helping us sweep the barracks floor. He said, "You see how dirty it is. You know we have got to get all that brown stuff off the commodes, too. Be sure we clean them good."

He stood the broom against a bunk "It's got to be clean in here. You know what I mean." We told him it would really be

clean when we walked out and shut the door. He smiled and walked out of the barracks.

After he left, we did clean up the place a bit. I gathered most of my personal belongings and we all walked together to our aircraft and put our gear on board. We looked the airplane over good and everything was in good shape. Dabbs did a better job of wrapping his neon sign in a blanket and securing it in the tail section of the airplane.

We walked on back to the barracks together. As we entered the barracks, there stood Lieutenant Wright and Captain Stewart. I was sure we were in for a chewing about the barracks not being clean. We really had done very little except sweep the floor and pick up our personal gear.

As soon as we entered our barracks we all gave Wright and Stewart a snappy salute because we were sure we were in for a chewing. Stewart and Wright returned our salute.

"Well, I see you fellows did a pretty good job of cleaning up the barracks," Stewart said. "Make sure you don't get it dirty tonight. We gotta leave things clean for the next guys coming in." He studied us a minute and said, "Oh, yes. You know, fellows, you are all staff sergeants now. Congratulations."

He smiled and strode out of the barracks with Wright staying behind with us.

We looked at each, grinning.

"Staff sergeants?" Tyler said.

"Us?" I said.

"Can you beat that?" said Cross.

Wright congratulated us. "Captain Stewart came by here earlier today to tell you about the promotions," Wright said. "He said you looked like you were cleaning up the place. He decided not to say anything until I could come along with him."

Now we knew the real reason that Stewart came by the barracks that morning - and it wasn't to tell us to clean up the place.

We really liked this guy. There was more to him than just a Hollywood celebrity - a lot more.

Our barracks was very large. Now it seemed hollow. There was only one other crew in it. They were down at the far end. Tomorrow morning, we would be leaving.

The night was long and lonely in the barracks. I spent most of the night reading Elizabeth's letters. I had not received a letter or heard from her since I put her on an airplane in St. Louis to go back home to Memphis. A month had passed since I had heard from her.

Our moving around the country, and the overseas orders, had screwed up my mail delivery. I had written several letters before we were restricted because of the overseas orders.

I had to find out how Elizabeth was. I went to the post exchange and found a phone. I got through to Memphis on my first try. Perhaps, it was because there were very few soldiers on the base now to compete for the phone lines.

I knew that the last time I talked to Elizabeth on the phone, she had paid 175 dollars for the call. I knew I would have to be careful this time. Elizabeth answered the phone. She was in bed and had gone to sleep. I told her about my new rank and that I was flying to Lincoln the next day. I gave her an Army Post Office number where she could write to me if I went overseas. She said she had written to me every day. After thirty minutes, I forced myself to hang up the phone. Half crying, yet happy that I had been able to talk to my angel, I felt her close to me. It had been hard to say goodbye.

I was soon back in the barracks and lying in the bunk. I went to sleep with Elizabeth's picture in my hand.

Morning came quickly. Too quickly. It was 5 a.m. and time to roll up the blankets and mattress.

After breakfast we went out to the plane, did a preflight inspection and started the engines. They all checked out. The officers showed up at 7 a.m. We sat on the ramp under a wing and went over details of the flight. Maybe this time it would stick. All the other planes were starting their engines.

After a short flight, we landed at Lincoln. A Jeep met our plane and we followed it to a remote area assigned to the 703rd Squadron. We unloaded our personal gear and were taken to operations and then to a barracks.

The next day, we were given another physical examination. Our medical records were checked over. I thought we had been given all the shots there were in the world, but there were obviously a few more yet for us to take.

Our brief stop in Lincoln was for the purpose of having our plane put into condition, ready for combat. It was going to take ten days to complete. The air crew was to attend a briefing once a day. The rest of the time, we could do anything we wanted, except leave the base.

It was hard to fill the time. Cross and I went to the post exchange and bought more staff sergeant stripes and sewed them on our uniforms. We got our clothes clean. We put our uniforms in

top condition. Evenings were spent going to the picture show on the base. Anything to pass the time.

The second night, standing in line and waiting to get in the picture show, a soldier was causing a disturbance with another soldier in the line in front of us. We noticed he was an Infantry private first class. The two men were about to fight. I asked Cross, "I wonder if our rank has any meaning?" Cross said, "Well, let's find out." We both walked up to the two soldiers. I approached the one causing all the trouble and said in a firm voice, "Private, I believe you had better go to the back of the line unless you want to end up in the brig." He looked at me and then at my staff sergeant's stripes. He said, "Yes, sir, sergeant. I am going back there now."

Cross and I got back in line. That was it. Cross said, "Well, rank means something in the Infantry." I said, "Maybe it was just the silver wings that blinded him." We were real proud of ourselves. This was the first and only time in the military that we used, or felt like using, our rank.

We were late getting out of the picture show. They had a double feature. When we came out, it was dark. Cross and I started walking back to our barracks. Cross pointed to a short cut.

There were long rows of barracks on the way to our own area. An Infantry soldier in full battle dress, with a rifle on his shoulder and a military police arm band, stopped us. "Aren't you soldiers supposed to be in your bunks?" he said. We told him who we were. He saw our silver wings and staff sergeant stripes and recognized that we were not part of his outfit.

He walked along with us, talking. He said everyone in his outfit had to be in their bunks, with lights turned out, by 2000 hours. They had bed count at that time. You were A.W.O.L. if you were not in your bunk. He could hardly believe we had the run of the whole base, and could go anywhere we wanted to. As we approached the other side of the area, he told us we were the first bomber crewmen he had talked to. When we left, we wished him good luck. "You two boys will need the luck," he said. "And God's help, too. I wish you both well."

Cross and I thought the soldier was lonesome and homesick. He had needed to talk to someone. What a strict outfit he was in, I thought. He couldn't even go to the latrine without asking someone's permission. "We sure are lucky we're not in the Infantry," I said. "Just think. We get to fly and ride everywhere we go. He has to walk everywhere. I sure feel sorry for guys like that when they go into combat."

After walking all over the place in the dark, we found our barracks. Cross' short cut turned out to be the long way home. We even got lost when we left the path.

At the barracks, some of the fellows still had a card game going. I went to bed.

Before I slept, I noticed a small bump on the side of my neck.

## My Angel of the Night

The next morning, I awoke with the bump on my neck looking bigger. I asked Cross to look at it. He said it was too big to fool with and it felt hot. By 1300 hours, I was feeling bad and had a fever.

The whole thing scared me. It was things like this that could get you bumped off a crew if they were moving fast.

I thought I had better go on sick call. At the clinic, the medic took one look and called a doctor. When the doctor looked at it, he said, "Send this man to the hospital at once."

I went to the hospital ward and they took my clothes and gave me a gown to put on. They put me to bed. The nurse started putting hot packs on my neck and giving me pills every hour.

The next day, the lump was as big as an egg and it throbbed. The doctor ordered hot packs to be applied every hour, day and night. I was given shots and more pills. I asked the nurse to save some of the pills for someone else to take. She said I had a cyst in my neck that would have to be taken out.

I talked with the doctor. I told him my crew was leaving in a few days.

"I have to leave with them, Doc," I said.

"You're not going anywhere for at least two weeks," he said. "That's how long it takes to get rid of this kind of cyst."

The bottom dropped out of everything. I wondered what would happen to me now.

The next couple of days, the nurses and orderlies kept the hot packs coming. The soldier in the bed next to mine kept saying, "You should be glad. Lie back and stay here as long as you can. As long as you are here, they won't be able to send you any place else. These people treat you good. I'm planning to stick around here as long as I can."

I couldn't understand his thinking. I kept wondering if he was faking a medical problem so he could stay in the hospital.

On my third day in the hospital, Wright found out I was there and came to see me. Cross had been coming every day and filling me in with the news and progress of the work on our airplane.

A very pretty nurse on the night shift was beginning to take a great deal of interest in me. I told her my sad story, about how I had to get out of there, how I couldn't let my crew and my plane leave without me. I said I just had to be on that bomber when it left Lincoln. When I had such a high fever that I hardly knew what I was doing, the nurse would come and sit by me and hold my hand. The soldier in the next bed said, "She must think a lot of you, sergeant."

This nurse lieutenant was like an angel from heaven when she came to sit by me and hold my hand during the night. She would try to tell me that everything would work out okay. In the daytime, a lady would come by and give me a book to read and she would talk a while. Her name was Francis. She said she prayed for me every night, that I reminded her of her own son. She tried to give me confidence that everything would turn out fine. It was nice to have the feeling that someone cared a little about you.

Everyone on the crew came to see me three different times. The last time they came, they told me the airplane was ready and they would have to leave at 9 a.m. the next day. They were going to Morrison Field in Florida and would fly over Memphis on the way there. I told Wright to see that all my personal gear was put aboard the plane, that I would be on it. I said, "I'll meet you on the runway, if necessary. I will climb out the hospital window, if I have to." Cross said, "I'll see that everything is taken care of." As the crew left, I could see they believed this was the last they ever would see of me.

As night came, I was feeling real sorry for myself. I was trying to figure out how to leave this place with my neck bandaged and with no street clothes. My clothes were locked up in the nurses office. This short gown was all I had to wear.

The pretty night nurse came on duty. I told her what I was thinking and about all my troubles. She said, "They will only send you back if you get out of here without being discharged properly. I doubt if you would even make it off the hospital grounds."

Late that night, after everyone had left, the nurse came by my bed and kissed me by the ear. "Come to the examination room," she whispered.

I quickly got out of bed and went to the examination room, being as quiet as I could be. The nurse said to get up on the examination table and lie on my stomach. She took the bandage from my neck and cut open the bump. She took an instrument that looked like a cork screw, and pulled out of my neck three long strands that looked like roots. She packed some gauze in the hole and put a patch over it. She handed me some extra gauze and some pills and a bottle of some kind of medicine.

"Put the medicine on your neck when you change the packing and the bandage," she said. "I'm leaving the clothes locker unlocked. Put your clothes on when I go over and check the next ward."

I was already reaching for my pants. "You don't have a worry in the world. I'll be on the plane and off the base by 9 this morning."

She said they wouldn't check my ward until 8 a.m. and she would sign me out as being discharged yesterday. If the doctor remembered me, she would be in trouble, she said. She looked at the schedule. "But I think he's off tomorrow and everything may work out."

She turned and kissed me. "Good luck, sergeant. Take care of yourself. God go with you." She held my hand another moment and then left to check the other ward while I finished dressing.

I could hardly believe she was doing this for me. She was such a pretty nurse and so very nice to me. I could have fallen in love with her. I hit the floor of the ward and hurried down the hall to the first exit I found. I opened it and took off running. When I looked at my watch, it was almost 6 a.m. I tried to cover the bandage on my neck with my shirt collar but it was too big to cover. The place was draining and the bandage was getting damp.

I got to the barracks. The crew looked surprised to see me. Cross helped me change the bandage and make it smaller. When he saw the hole, he said, "Boy, you'd better take care of this."

I was feeling good, even though I was a little weak from being on my back for the past five days. I sure wasn't going to tell anyone, though.

Wright came by the barracks and saw me. He asked if I had been discharged from the hospital. He shook his head. "No," he said, "don't tell me. Just let's get the hell out of here."

We were soon at the flight line and ready for takeoff. It was now 0830 and Wright called the controlled tower. The tower gave us permission to leave. We taxied to the end of the runway, turned onto it and gathered speed. When we lifted off, I felt great again. Boy, was I glad to be leaving that place. I had taken one of the pills that the nurse gave me, and now I was feeling pretty good. Looking back and seeing the field disappear, made me feel even better.

It was going to be a long flight to West Palm Beach, Florida and Morrison Field. I made myself comfortable in the waist of the bomber. Dabbs was lying on the luggage rack in the bomb bay, trying to sleep.

I had made myself comfortable on the floor of the waist of the airplane along with Cross, Tyler and two of our passengers. Dabbs and one passenger were in the baggage compartments in the bomb bay. Everyone else was on the flight deck and in the nose.

The music was flowing smoothly through our headsets. Wright was playing the radio over the bomber's intercom. I was about to go to sleep when Wright called out, "Robbie. Aren't you from Memphis, Tennessee?" I confirmed. He said, "We will be over the Mississippi River in about ten minutes. We should be at Memphis when we cross the river." Lieutenant Alexander, the navigator, said we would cross at Memphis.

I jumped up and started looking out the left waist window for the river. My eyes were glued on the terrain as it passed under us. In a few minutes, there was the mighty Mississippi. I recognized where we were as soon as I saw the river near Memphis. I had flown over the river in this area many times. We were going to pass almost over the river bridge at Memphis, in a flight path north of the airport and just south of my home in the eastern part of the city. As we flew over Memphis I could see my home. We were flying at 8,000 feet. Everything on the ground looked small. I could almost imagine I could see my angel, my Elizabeth, down there. It was like a dream, standing there in the airplane, picking out where my wife and I lived. What a sight it was, to be that near home. Memphis and the dream soon passed out of view. I was almost wondering if I had seen my home or if I had been dreaming.

We were now flying over the state of Mississippi and part of the area that I used to fly over when I was a civilian pilot. Cross and Tyler had looked over my shoulder as I pointed out the city and countryside as it slid under us.

It was all gone now. I sat back down on the floor. If only I could have been on the ground.

We were now about half way to Morrison Field. I began to come to life and walk around the airplane some. I noticed that the armor plate that was on the side of the ship by the waist windows was gone. The steel floor plate also had been removed. I looked at the tail turret. The steel plates were missing by the doors. I went to the flight deck to start complaining and the steel plate was gone from the top turret and from the flight deck behind the pilot and co-pilot seats. In fact all the protective steel plates were gone.

This was nuts, I thought. Here we are, going overseas into combat. We go through training with steel armor plate everywhere, and now it has been removed. There were two fuel tanks installed in front of the bomb bay, one on each side, and two luggage racks in the rear of the bomb bay on each side where Dabbs was sleeping on top of the bags. New oxygen bottles had been installed, of the low pressure shatter-proof type. Dabbs' neon sign was still wrapped in a blanket and tied on the right side near the tail turret.

I was beginning to come alive and notice everything around me. Maybe it was passing over Memphis, or maybe some of my medicine was wearing off.

I asked Cross if he would put a new bandage on my neck for me before we landed at Morrison Field. I took off the old bandage and packing. It had stopped draining. Cross said it was looking better but had a long way to go. He put on as small a bandage as he could, trying to make it look like a professional job. We didn't want the medics to be concerned.

It was now 1600 hours. We had been flying seven hours and thirty minutes when we began to see the Atlantic Ocean and Morrison Field and nearby West Palm Beach. We sat down on the field and went directly to operations. Airplanes were spread all over the field among the palm trees. The weather was balmy and nice and the palms were something different to see. The field was pretty and green.

As we stood in front of the operations building, the wind was lightly blowing across my face and the smell of the ocean was in the air. Coconuts hung on the trees near the operations building. I could see clusters of B-24s everywhere I looked. Some of the groups of airplanes had camouflage covering them.

We walked in. Several officers greeted us. The operations officer took our records. He told us to go to the next building. A team of medics there would give us a quick check. In the next

building were a number of doctors waiting for us. They asked if we were feeling all right or had some complaint. They looked at our throats. The first doctor I came to asked about the bandage on my neck. I told him that I had been released from the Army Hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska, and had a small carbuncle on my neck and it was now healing. The doctor pulled the bandage up and said it looks pretty clean but it was still pretty red. In the next breath, he said, replacing the bandage, "I guess, if the hospital in Lincoln released you, everything is okay. Just take care of it." I said, "I am sure going to do that. I have some medicine to put on it."

I was afraid they were looking for me when I heard that a medical team would be looking us over. They seemed to be more interested in our throats than anything else. They took a swab and got a test culture from each of our throats.

We were assigned to a barracks. Only one other crew was in it. It was a nice large barracks and there were sheets, pillows and blankets on the thick mattresses. We were all driven back to our airplane in a Jeep to get our personal belongings and return them to the barracks.

After a good night's sleep, we had the day off. We were not to leave the base or talk to anyone about our squadron in transit. It was late when we awoke. We didn't feel like going to the mess hall. The other six fellows in the barracks with us told about a great post exchange cafeteria on the base that we would enjoy. I asked Cross if he would like to try breakfast there.

Cross and I went there to get breakfast. When we arrived, we picked out a table near the cafeteria serving line. The place was huge and the line was full of the most beautiful women and girls anyone had ever seen at one time. We just sat there and watched girls.

There were girls in shorts, in dresses and in skirts. There were girls with only halters and shorts, some with thin blouses and some in only swimming suits and wrap-around open skirts. There were blonds, brunettes, girls with black and red hair. Some girls had short hair, and some wore their hair long.

We learned that they all worked at offices on the base. Even the girls serving the lines were pretty. We just sat there looking. It was hard to believe there were that many pretty girls anywhere. We finally got up and went through the line.

We stayed around the post exchange and cafeteria area until almost noon. The line was still full of girls, coming and going.

Boy! What a place to spend the day. We walked back to the barracks and told our story to everyone we saw.

That afternoon, we went back to the post exchange before the dinner hour and we watched girls until late in the afternoon. There were so many soldiers there that Cross and I were just two more soldiers lost in the crowd. We would speak to some of the girls as they came near us. Cross and I just sat at the table and drank Coke and water until we were about to rupture. Cross said, "This place must be near Heaven."

On the way back to the barracks, we found a barber shop. Cross and I stopped in and got a hair cut. The barber cut my hair and removed the bandage that was on the back of my neck. He told me that it was looking pretty good and was healing. The barber was careful when he cut the hair near it. I asked if he thought I could leave the bandage off. He said, "I think it would heal quicker if it was off." Most of the swelling was gone. He sold me a bottle of alcohol to put on it. I left the bandage off. It made me feel better.

We went back to the post exchange after we cleaned up. Cross and I both tried to make ourselves look like what a flier was supposed to look like. I sure felt a lot better with the bandage off my neck. I guess I was just a little self-conscious around all the girls.

I had a good night's sleep. There was a cool breeze from the ocean. The night was beautiful. I could see the puffy white clouds and the big bright moon through the palm trees from my bunk in the barracks. What a place this would be to have to stay.

The next morning was November 12, 1943. We had arrived in this paradise only the day before.

We were assigned to a class and we got up early and had breakfast at the mess hall. The food was the best that we ever had in the Army. Back to the barracks and then to the classroom building. We were all given instructions on radio signals and codes, then a sheet of Morse code to keep and learn as quickly as possible. They wanted the whole crew to know the radio codes, not only the radio operator. We were told to practice it and use it until we remembered all of the Morse code. We were going around dot-dashing everywhere we went for the rest of the day. We were given three hours on the radio, sending and receiving Morse code.

In the evening, we were issued .45 caliber automatics with a leather shoulder holster, and a new wrist watch. We were all told to strap the automatics over our shoulders and not to take them off.

"Don't draw the automatic out of your holster unless you intend to kill someone," they said.

We were ready to go back to girl watching. I guess we were all getting lonely just for a girl to talk to. So back to the post exchange for dinner we all went. Dabbs became the center of attraction. He would find and carry on a conversation with four or five girls at the same time.

The next day, Cross and I were again in the post exchange when we noticed a crowd of GIs. We pushed our way through the group to see what the center of attraction was. There was a GI standing in the center and he was eating glass and razor blades. We said to each other that was impossible. As we stood there watching, here came Dabbs with a new package of razor blades that he had just bought.

Dabbs, said to the GI, "I bet you five dollars that you can't eat the blades in this package. There was something wrong with the ones you ate." They both put up five dollars for someone else to hold.

The GI took the blades, opened the package and laid the blades one at a time on his tongue. He bit down on them and chewed the blades into little pieces and swallowed them. He reached over to the guy holding the money and took it.

Dabbs said, "I don't believe it." I asked the fellow how he passed the blades through his body. He said the pieces worked out through the wall of his stomach. This was just too much for me. I just didn't understand what I had seen.

As we turned to walk away, the GI broke a glass, put a piece of it in his mouth. He started chewing it up into little pieces. I told Cross and Dabbs, "Lets get away from this guy. He is nuts." We talked about the guy eating glass all evening. I said, "Someone had better lock that guy up." That was the last time that we ever saw the guy. I thought, "It takes all kinds to make a world. How did he ever get in the Army?"

Late in the afternoon, we were told that we would have to guard our own aircraft that night. We split the time among the enlisted men, each taking two-hour shifts. We only had to cover from 2000 hours to 0800 hours. Military police would guard the bomber during the day. We all wondered who was going to steal an airplane.

I drew an early guard shift, from 2000 hours to 2200 hours. I just sat in the cockpit for the two hours. This wasn't really a bad deal. Lieutenant Wittman came out to the aircraft and sat with me.

Wittman told me all about bombardier school. We talked about Biloxi and the Gulf Coast, and his home town of Pass Christian. We really got to know each other for the first time.

Cook showed up to relieve me. He had drawn the next shift. Wittman and I walked on back to the barracks area. We stopped at operations and drank some coffee together. I only tried to drink it. I couldn't stand the stuff. We asked the operations officer on duty why we were guarding the aircraft. He said there were rumors about sabotage, and they were taking them seriously.

The field was fenced and military police patrolled it. The ships were sitting out among the palm trees in the bright moonlight. In fact, it was just a beautiful night.

I wondered why anyone would want to destroy airplanes on a night like this. War seemed to be so far away.

Lying in my bunk, back at the barracks, I kept watching the moon and the big bright stars. Elizabeth was the only thing in my mind. "What a waste this big beautiful night is without my angel here with me," I thought. It now had been more than three weeks since I had heard from home. We were not allowed to use a phone or to mail letters until we had left the base. I could only remember watching the white clouds roll by the big moon. I thought I must be hardening now, being away from my wife, because tears were not showing up in my eyes as I lay thinking of her. I woke from a deep and refreshing night's sleep the next morning.

The sun was up, and it was the beginning of another perfect day. Everyone had stood watch during the night without any complaining. Not even a word of complaint from Dabbs. "This Florida must be agreeing with us," I thought.

## My Lovable Hula Dancer

That evening, the members of the squadrons on the base were invited to see a play that was being put on by the local USO group in a theater building near the flight line. It was for crew members who were in transit. It turned out to be a variety show with a lot of pretty girls dancing and singing for nearly two hours. The last act ended with girls dressed in hula skirts doing a Hawaiian dance. Some were strumming ukuleles while others were swaying their hips and talking with their hands. The grass skirts made the



Will you marry me?

girls look beautiful. After the last act, the girls all came off the stage and hugged and kissed us.

One of the girls, a very pretty girl about my age, came up to me and said, "Will you marry me?" Cross, sitting beside me, said, "Robbie sure will marry you because he's already married." The girl ignored him. She took my hand and pulled me up and we walked outside of the theater. She was pulling me. When we got outside she asked me where I was from and what my name was. I told her and we sat down on the theater steps together. The other crew members were coming out of the theater, each with a girl pulling him.

As we continued to talk, she wanted to see the .45 automatic that I had in my shoulder holster. I told her that I couldn't take it out of the shoulder holster because it was loaded. I told her we had been guarding our aircraft and were instructed to wear the .45 automatic at all times. We had to eat and sleep with it on. I think it was exciting to her to see us carrying a gun. I asked her name. She said, "They call me Connie. My name is Connie Alma Owens." I said Connie was a very pretty name and that she sure had pretty brown hair. Connie told me that she lived in Miami, Florida, and liked to dance with the USO.

Connie really was a pretty girl. The grass skirt falling between her legs, and the halter around her breast made her even prettier to me. It sure was a good thing we were sitting on the theater steps on the base with everyone around us, instead of somewhere alone. We talked about the evening star that was in the sky and the beautiful white puffy clouds floating by as we looked up through the palm trees.

There were some of the other members of the crew talking to the other girls around us. Connie asked if I would show her our airplane. "The bus will soon be coming to pick us up," she said. I said that I would walk to the flight line with her but I couldn't show her the airplane because it was out in the field. We walked down the street, with her holding my hand. Connie asked, "Do you have a girl friend?" I said, "Yes. A very pretty one." She said, "Am I as pretty as she is?" I changed the subject. She was bare footed so I told her, "Be careful on the rocks along the walk."

We walked on to the flight line, near a B-24 that was being worked on. I said, "Our ship looks like that one." I pointed out where our ship was located across the field and said that we would be leaving soon. We walked back to the theater. Her bus had arrived to take all the girls in the show back to their homes.

At the bus, Connie put her arms around my neck and kissed me, holding herself close to me. She then quickly turned and got on the bus and got a seat by a window. Cross and I were standing on the sidewalk below. Connie said to me, "You know, I'm going to marry you some day."

Cross asked me, "What in the world did you do to her?" I said, "Not a thing. She's a very pretty and a very nice girl. I tried to keep away from her. Besides, I have a wedding ring on my finger." Cross said, "Boy! She fell for you." We walked on back to the barracks and I didn't have much to say. I thought, "If only the hula girl had been Elizabeth, my wife. Well, I'll never see her again. She was just trying to make me happy before going overseas."

I had the last shift to guard the aircraft the next morning. The shift would be from 6 until 8. At least, I was going to be able to sleep most of the night before I had to go out to guard the airplane.

Wright was waiting for us when we got back from the USO show. He said we would be leaving the field at 1000 hours tomorrow, to get everything ready to go.

I was up the next morning at 4:30 and went out to the aircraft to relieve Tyler who was on guard duty. I took all my gear and put it in the baggage rack in the rear of the bomb bay. I sat down with Tyler and we talked for a while. He left early, just before 6 a.m., to get his gear from the barracks. I checked over the airplane and helped fuel it when the gasoline truck came by. We topped off all the tanks except the tanks in the bomb bay racks which we left empty.

The military police showed up at 8 a.m. I left everything in their hands and went to the mess hall to eat. After breakfast, I walked to the post exchange for a last look at all the girls. I bought a few personal things, such as hair oil, shaving lotion and tooth paste. Time was passing fast. I headed for the operation building. The rest of the crew was showing up.

The operations officers began to brief us about our trip overseas. He said we would fly the southern route. The flight path would be from Morrison Field to Puerto Rico, to Georgetown in British Guyana, to Belem and Natal, Brazil, to Dakar in Senegal, to Marrakech, French Morocco and from there to England. This was going to be some trip. It was all laid out on a big wall chart.

We were given special packs that would be of help in getting out of the jungles of South America if our plane went down in them.

The operation officer pointed out possible routes out of the jungle and advised following any river to the coast. "It would be impossible to find you in the jungle," he said. Rescuers couldn't even find our plane if we went down in the jungle. "The jungle would cover a wreck fast," he said. The escape pack was made to last about five days and contained food, medicines and a stainless steel knife,

I couldn't even imagine such a jungle. I had spent plenty of time in the woods and thought I could get along pretty well in them. The briefing officer turned out to be a jungle expert. He had lived in the jungles of South America.

We all picked up our new parachute harness and back packs. The packs were shaped to fit our backs, under the parachute harness. We all made sure that our May West life jackets had new CO-2 bottles in them.

Cook and I went on out to the airplane and gave it a complete check. We inspected the dingy radio and made sure the life rafts were installed and in place. I had fueled the plane earlier but we checked again. We went down the complete check list. This time, we felt we were playing for keeps, and we had to make this trip without trouble.

We were sure that we were ready. Each gun was in place and had twenty rounds of ammunition in it. It was hardly enough to shoot at anything but maybe it would scare somebody.

While waiting for the other members of the crew we looked through our jungle back packs. There was a bolo knife that folded into the handle. It had a beautiful, wide, stainless steel blade that was as sharp as a razor. "Boy! I'd sure like to keep this knife," I thought.

The rest of the crew soon showed up. Tyler and I pulled the props through on one side, and Cross and Dabbs on the other side of the bomber.

Wright started the engines and went through the check list. We were ready. Everyone checked in over the intercom. The personnel on board now consisted of the crew and two passengers. We were taking two ground personnel who were assigned to us for transport overseas.

We lifted off the runway, flew across the city of West Palm Beach, and out over the ocean. The coast line was a beautiful sight to see. Deep green water, deep blue water and sparkling white waves. In some places you could even see the bottom of the ocean. We soon crossed near the islands of the Bahamas and were heading

for San Juan, Puerto Rico. After we became familiar with the beauty of the ocean, its many coral reefs and islands, we started talking with each other. We were flying at an altitude of 8,000 feet and it was very comfortable. The weather was just beautiful. Blue skies and small puffy white clouds floating along.

Cross asked me about the hula girl that I had met. He said she was kind of pretty. I told him that the one he was talking to wasn't ugly. In fact, all of the girls in the show were pretty. Cross asked, "Why was she saying that she was going to marry you?" I said, "I guess it was because I had a wedding ring on my finger. Maybe you had better get you one." "Well!" he said, "the girl I was talking to didn't ask me to marry her." "I guess you just don't have what it takes," I said, wanting to drop the subject. Dabbs started kidding me about her. I told Dabbs that I had worn the wedding ring on my finger ever since Elizabeth had given it to me.

The flight was getting longer and longer. Alexander said on the intercom that we were twenty-five minutes from San Juan and that we should see the island of Puerto Rico in a few minutes in front of us.

Wright had the airplane perfectly on course and the big island appeared just in front of us. Wright turned the music off over the intercom and everyone began to get ready for the landing. We were making an approach from the sea. The airport was on the edge of the ocean, almost in the ocean.

On the approach, Wright called for a visual check for wheels down and locked. I confirmed left wheel down and locked. Tyler confirmed right wheel down and locked. Lieutenant Wittman, nose wheel down and locked. We went in, just clearing the edge of the water, and made a nice soft landing. At the other end of the runway, we were directed to taxi to an area near the operations area.

It was now 1600 hours. We had been in the air six hours and thirty minutes.

We were met by a Jeep and driven to the operations building. While there, we asked about some of the other crews and if they had arrived okay. Some had already arrived and had departed. Some others were still on their way. We were told that we would have to guard our own airplane while we were on the island, even though there would be other guards around. We drew for times to guard the ship. The officers pitched in to pull guard duty with us. We were assigned to our barracks and told where to eat.

We walked over to the barracks which were near. The airfield was full of native Puerto Ricans. The women were short and fat, and most of the men were dark. All the Puerto Ricans worked on the base. As we passed the women, they would stop and look at us, as if they had never seen a soldier before.

Most of us hung around the airplane most of the night. Cook and I checked over the aircraft and made sure everything was working. We just felt like we were in a strange place and didn't trust anyone.

We had a B-24-H. The call numbers were 41-29132. We were the number six airplane and our crew number was 76. Our airplane was almost new. We had received it new in Sioux City, Iowa. We were now getting used to having "the lady" around and were even falling in love with her. We were beginning to feel that we only had her to depend on. She was becoming the most important thing in our lives now. We knew that she wasn't going to let us down.

Everyone was at the airplane early the next morning. Wright had picked up his orders. Alexander had his navigation charts. We were to leave at 0800 hours. Of course, Dabbs was the last to get out to the ship.

This leg of our trip would be between six and seven hours long, depending on the winds that we would have. We would be landing in South America at Georgetown, British Guyana, a coastal city on the edge of the jungle.

Wright taxied to the end of the runway. We would be leaving with some of the other squadron ships at ten-minute intervals. Our flight path would take us over the Caribbean Islands and we would come in sight of Trinidad, then follow the coastline to Georgetown.

The airplane lifted off and turned out over the ocean. Small islands were like jewels sprinkled through it. We were all enjoying the sights and beginning to settle down for the long flight. We were flying along at 8,000 feet. Buckey, the co-pilot, was talking to Wright about going to a lower altitude so we could enjoy the sights more. Wright said we were assigned to this altitude and we would stay here.

Suddenly, radio silence was broken and out came a May Day call. Then silence again. We knew there was an airplane out there in trouble. But where was it? Wright was sure it was in front of us, for some reason. The radio operator, Van Bogelin, soon received information that all our planes were accounted for except crew

number 55 on a B-24 numbered 42-761724. It was Lieutenant Albert Poor's crew.

We were told to look for rafts or debris on the water. Wright dropped down to 5,000 feet and we looked as far as we could see from both sides of the ship. Everyone kept their eyes glued to the water as we passed. We kept talking about how there were twelve men aboard that B-24.

Wright soon received orders to return to his assigned altitude. We were told that a German submarine had been reported in the area and to stay clear of all single vessels that we might see on the ocean's surface. It was possible that Poor's B-24 had been shot down by the German submarine. This was a chilling turn of events. Everyone was now on the ball. We watched the ocean for a sight of anything.

We received another message telling us there would be U. S. Naval vessels in the area but they would be sailing with at least one other vessel, never alone. There also would be Naval aircraft searching the area.

Lieutenant Wittman in the nose turret spotted debris floating on the surface of the water. We were unable to identify the debris. There were no signs of life on or near the debris. Its position was reported as soon as Alexander got a fix on it.

Wittman announced on the intercom that there were vessels in sight, at the 1 o'clock position. Our eyes were glued on them. We soon passed ten vessels on our right, all sailing in single file. There were many smaller vessels on each side of the main line, zig-zagging all over the place. Everything looked like little toys down there in that big ocean. I was sure glad that I was not down there on one of those little boats.

It wasn't long until Alexander said we should be able to see land in front of us in another ten minutes. He gave Wright a new heading. Wright said, "I'm picking up signals from Trinidad." We were right on course. We soon crossed Trinidad and entered open waters again. Alexander said we would be nearing Georgetown in an hour.

The coastline soon came in sight, ahead and to our right. There it was: Georgetown. We were soon over the airfield and landing without incident. We were directed to operations, and then to a barracks and the mess hall. We tried to find out more about the lost airplane but no one had information about it.

"You must guard your ship at all times," the operations officer told us. Everyone on the crew agreed to guard the plane for an hour shift, around the clock.

Cook and I stayed with the airplane most of the time. We sure didn't want anything to happen to it now. The flight had taken six and a half hours. Wright had reported one of the magnetos on the number two engine dropping off a little. It wasn't enough to red line the engine when Cook and I checked it out but we would be watching it on the next leg of our flight.

Evening came. The air base didn't seem to have a great many personnel. There were a few British officers and soldiers walking around who spoke to us as we passed them. The enlisted British soldiers would salute us when they passed, and we would return their salute. I was told that British soldiers saluted their noncoms.

In the mess hall there were all kinds of fruits on the table. The food was very good and there was plenty of it.

The operations officer told us to be ready to take off the next morning by 0730. We would be crossing the Amazon River basin, some of the worst terrain in South America. "Just don't go down," he said. "You would never get out of the jungle alive. The jungle overgrows everything in a day or so, and you could not be seen. If anything happens, try to make it to a river and follow it to the coastline. Good luck."

On the morning of November 7, we were all up and at the airplane. No one had found out anything about Lieutenant Poor's crew. They had not arrived and had to be considered down. Twelve men and an aircraft, somewhere in the ocean.

At 0700 we were off and in the air again, heading for Belem, Brazil, a flight of six hours and thirty minutes. On the right side of us we could see jungles and mountains. On the left was the ocean and the coastline. As we turned inland, all there was to see was tree tops and more tree tops. There were no clearings as far as the eye could see. Wright said the Belem air base was in the jungle, not far from a big river.

The cover of foliage on the ground was the most dense that I had ever seen. I checked our fuel several times, and relieved Cook on the flight deck, from time to time. Van Bogelen, the radio operator, was glued to the radio. If we went down, he intended to be in contact with someone before we hit.

As we flew over more and more jungle, we approached an open body of water that looked like the ocean. Alexander said, "It's

the Amazon River." As we crossed the mouth of the Amazon, you could see its dark stream continuing for miles out into the ocean.

As we lowered our altitude on the approach to the airport in the jungle at Belem, it became apparent that the trees were amazingly tall and large. The thickness of the jungle undergrowth was unbelievable.

Landing on the runway was like dropping down between two green canyons, with the tall trees on each side of us. The trees kept sunlight from shining on the ground.

We taxied from the runway to the ramp and parked the airplane. We all got out and went to the operations building where they welcomed us and directed us to the mess hall and barracks. Our officers walked with us to their quarters which were only a few buildings from ours.

I noticed the jungle was only cut back about twenty-five feet. The jungle was so thick that you could not see more than three or four feet into it. The place smelled like a jungle. It made you feel like you were a long way from civilization. On down the road, I saw a sign that said, "Do not go into the jungle. You will not find your way out if you walk twenty-five feet into it. Caution. You will get lost." These signs were everywhere. I thought, They really don't need the signs for me because I'm sure not going into that jungle. You could hear all kinds of birds and animal noises coming from it.

Cross and I walked into the first barracks we came to. When we walked in the door, a British sergeant yelled, "Attention." A group of British soldiers jumped up and stood as straight as boards. The sergeant asked if he could help us. We told him we were looking for the barracks which the American airmen were assigned to. The sergeant, a huge human being, was so black that he shone. He spoke perfect King's English. "Pardon me, sir. You must go to the next block area, sir." Then he saluted us. We returned the salute, thanked him, and turned and walked out. We looked at each other and said, "What discipline." We told the rest of the crew about the huge black sergeant, and how he spoke perfect English. "Boy!" I said, "What a specimen he was. I sure would hate to meet a bunch of soldiers in battle like him."

We arrived at the barracks area. Everything was in top shape and real clean. I was told that British soldiers kept the base spotless.

The mess hall was big and roomy. Each table had a table cloth and large bowl of fruit on it. Some of the bananas were more

than a foot long. We were served at the table, steak and everything to go with it. It was sure a long way from Army cooking.

Cook and I went out to the airplane to be sure everything was in order. There were British guards around it. We had to identify ourselves before we could get to the airplane. We got part of our bags and returned to the barracks.

I wrote Elizabeth a long letter about my travel adventures during our last days in Florida. I had several letters to mail to her if I could find a place to mail them.

I got a good night's sleep in spite of all the aircraft engines and the night noises coming out of the jungle from birds and animals. It would get quiet and then some bird or animal would scream.

We were up early on November 18. As soon as I ate breakfast, Cook and I went to the flight line. We checked over the airplane and met the others at operations.

We received a short briefing and were told our next stop would be Natal, Brazil. Our flight to Natal would still be over mountains and very dense jungles. We were advised to stay as close to the coastline as possible. We carefully preflighted the airplane. Alexander had to go back to operations to pick up flight charts that he had forgotten. We waited on him. The weather was to be good, with a few high cumulus clouds floating around.

When Alexander got back with his charts, Wright taxied out to the runway and we took off. We lifted out of the canyon of tall trees. We flew about a hundred miles inland from the coast, most of the way. Everything under us was green now.

The jungle was getting to be an old sight. So everyone found a comfortable place to lie down. It was going to be a six-hour flight.

Almost everyone on board was getting some sleep. Wright called me to the flight deck. I went up and Wright asked me if I wanted to fly a little, that he was going to stretch his legs. Buckey Kroll took over. Wright got out of the seat and I got into his pilot's seat position. Buckey released the autopilot and told me to keep it on the course, pointing to the autocompass and horizontal indicator. The ship was well trimmed. I didn't have to do much to keep it level.

Every now and then, I would notice Buckey dozing off. Wright was on the flight deck floor, stretched out. I punched Buckey and told him to stay awake, that I might do something wrong. "Okay," he said, "but you are doing all right." I was

listening to a radio navigational signal from Natal, and holding the plane on course. I was beginning to feel comfortable at the controls. The big old bird wasn't so hard to fly, straight and level. I was maintaining altitude without any trouble. The engines were just singing a nice, even song. In about an hour, Wright woke up and said, "Where are we?" I said, "On course and headed for Natal. I hope."

Wright got back in the pilot's seat and reset the gyro and the autopilot. He plugged in his headset and said, "Yep! Still on course." He called Alexander and said, "Wake up and tell me where we are." Alexander said, "I don't know where we are but I will find out." After a few minutes, using the sextant, Alexander came back on the intercom with a latitude and a longitude and picked our position out on the chart. He said, "We are now two hours from Natal." The whole crew had been asleep except for Buckey Kroll and me. Alexander woke them all up when he reported our position on the intercom.

We began to see the ocean and the coastline again. The terrain was now getting brown and flat. We made a long approach to the airport and touched down on a real long runway. When we touched down there was a lot of dust stirred up behind us. We followed a Jeep to the ramp and parked the aircraft. The wind was hot and dusty, with sand blowing in it. This was some change from the jungle field at Georgetown.

Natal, Brazil, was one big air base. There was every kind of airplane in the world there. Airplanes were parked everywhere. We went directly to operations after parking ours. We received instructions for the night and were assigned billets. The flight from Belem had only taken five hours and forty-five minutes and it was still early evening.

Cross, Dabbs, Tyler, Cook and I went back to the aircraft and talked to the ground crew chief. We talked about the magneto on number two engine and signed over the ship to him.

The ground crew chief, a technical sergeant, told us all about Natal. He said every woman who walked the street alone in Natal was a prostitute. He said nice women always were escorted by a member of their family.

He shouldn't have told this where Dabbs could hear it. Dabbs was really interested in what he was saying. In a short while, Dabbs left. A little later, Cross and I left Cook at the airplane and walked to the post exchange on the field.

In the post exchange, several civilians came up to us and wanted to sell us watches and women's silk and nylon stockings. They told us that if we were going to Africa we could get two or three times what we paid for them. They had many pretty watches and the post exchange had a large supply of them. Watches with Swiss movements were selling for five to fifteen dollars. Some had diamonds in them and sold for twenty-five dollars. Hose for women were a dollar a pair.

Cross and I each bought three watches, ten pair of hose and four bottles of Coca Cola. We took the stuff to the airplane and hid it in our bags in the baggage compartment. We went by the mess hall, then to the barracks. We lay around for a while and then walked around the base. Everything was sandy and gritty. The wind blew all the time. I remembered another place like this. It had been a gunnery school where sand hit you in the face all the time.

I returned to our aircraft. The ground crews had removed the cowlings from our no two engine. Cook was with them. The ground crew was changing out the spark plugs. I looked at some of the plugs that were coming out. They were fouled pretty badly. This would account for the magneto dropping the engine in RPMs.

Cook and I returned to the barracks and later went to eat. The night was hot and getting hotter. The darned gnats and sand flies were everywhere.

Cook asked me if I had seen Dabbs. I said, "No. Not since early evening." Cross said, "No telling where he has gone." Tyler and Van Bogelen hadn't see him, either. I said, "He must be in our part of the field. This area is well guarded and restricted." Cross said, "Don't worry. That doesn't mean anything to Dabbs."

The night was miserably hot and filled with crawling and flying bugs. I got out of bed early and went to the mess hall. We had not needed to clean our barracks or do any type work since we left Florida. Everything was done for us. This was almost like having hotel service.

Cook and I were still worried about our airplane's number two engine. We went to the flight line and the cowlings had been put back on the engine. We checked the repair record book Form 1 and 1-A and 41-B. Everything was in order. A twenty-five-hour inspection had been pulled.

Cook and I went back to operations and briefing. We were to leave early on the morning of November 19, 1943.

Everyone showed up, except Dabbs. No one knew where he was. Wright said, "We'll have to go on without him." We went

to the airplane and prepared to taxi to the runway. We all were hanging out of the plane, watching and looking for Dabbs. Wright taxied slowly out to the runway and sat there for a while. Wright went through the check list again. He told the tower to delay his takeoff for a few minutes. The tower confirmed.

Wright asked on the intercom, "Robbie, do you know of anything to return to the flight line ramp for?" Cook came on the intercom and said, "The number two engine was worked on. We could say that the magneto was dropping again." Wright said, "They might want to pull the engine if we complained about it. That would delay us too long." I said, "The right wheel brakes were grabbing a little. We could have them looked at. That wouldn't take too long." Wright told the tower we were returning to the ramp. As we returned, Wright dragged his wheel brakes a little. The ground crew pulled the right wheel and changed the brake blocks in about an hour.

When they were finished, we fooled around a little. Finally, Wright said, "We can't delay any longer. If Dabbs doesn't show up, he will just have to come over later." We taxied on out to the runway. Wright revved up the engines and was about to swing into position for takeoff. Tyler said on the intercom, "I see someone running toward the airplane, across the airfield." There he was. Dabbs was running as fast as he could. His feet were flying. Not far behind him was a Jeep coming after him. I knew it was Dabbs. I opened the camera hatch and Dabbs came up under the plane and got in. He was hollering, "Take off!" I closed the camera hatch and confirmed. Wright started rolling down the runway and we lifted off.

When we were in the air, Wright told Dabbs to come to the flight deck. The flying time today was to be over eleven hours. Every fuel tank on board was full to the top. Both bomb bay tanks, the Tokyo tanks (wing tip tanks) and the wing tanks were full. We used up most of the runway, getting airborne. Operations had given us the choice of going to Ascension Island or to Dakar, Africa. Alexander, the navigator, made the decision to try for the African continent. He didn't sound overly confident. He told Wright, "I'm sure I can find a whole continent. I don't know about a little island. We could miss it and then we'd really be in trouble. As big as Africa is, we will at least be over land when we run out of fuel, and not over the sea, looking around for an island."

Alexander's remarks weren't making any of us feel too good. We all agreed with him to try for Africa and hope for Dakar.

Eleven hours of flying was a long way, and that was about all the fuel we had.

## African Adventure

It was settled. The African continent was our destination. Alexander started figuring our estimated time of arrival.

Dabbs came back to the waist from his visit with Wright on the flight deck. He was pale. He said, "Boy, did Wright give me a tongue whipping."

I asked Dabbs, "What in the world kept you?" He said, "When I heard about the women in Natal, I wanted to find out for myself. I went under the fence and into town and, Robbie, I ran into a woman on every street corner. I have never had so much sex from so many pretty women in all my life. I'm sure coming back to Natal some day. There are more Spanish girls, as pretty as a picture, than you ever saw or dreamed of. I spent the night with six different girls and every time I started back to base, I ran into another one."

Dabbs said when he got back to the airfield and came under the fence, he saw our airplane moving toward takeoff position at the end of the runway. "I came running. Everything would have been all right if the military police hadn't seen me. Thank God, I made it."

He settled back with a little smile on his face.

We were about one hour out over the ocean when Wright received a radio message advising us that we might have a stowaway soldier on board our aircraft. Wright knew who they were looking for. In about fifteen minutes, Wright radioed back that the ship had been searched and everyone was accounted for. Only the crew and two passengers were aboard. He was told that the military police had seen someone boarding our bomber on takeoff. Wright came back with, "It must have been another ship."

We had been required to exchange our jungle back packs in Natal for a chest parachute harness. I had wanted to keep the jungle pack, certainly the knife. It was the best and sharpest I had ever seen.

The ocean was turning deep blue with lots of white caps all over it. Now, instead of green jungle below us, blue water was everywhere.

I checked the CO-2 bottles on my life jacket. I made sure I could get to the dingy radio. I had never seen so much water. After three hours of flying, everyone was looking for a place to lie down and sleep. I walked through the bomb bay to the flight deck. Cook and Dabbs were already asleep on the bags in the baggage racks. When I got to the flight deck, Wright asked me, "You want to hold the airplane on course for a while?" He got out of his seat and stretched. I got in the pilot's seat. Buckey told me the headings that we had to fly to get around some of the clouds, every now and then. Buckey always stayed in his seat. He never did get up and wander around the ship very much. Wright stretched out on the flight deck floor for a nap after he saw that everything was okay.

I had flown for about three hours. Buckey would tell me to stay away from the big cumulus clouds. Some of the clouds had black centers and rose to 50,000 feet. We were flying at 8,000 feet. The sky was deep blue and the clouds were scattered. The ocean was real dark blue now. Once in a while, I had to turn and fly around a cloud and get back on course. I gave the clouds plenty of room. I would have to compensate the heading to get back on course. Buckey would instruct me as to the heading correction to make and tell me how to reset the gyro. Wright got up from the flight deck floor and looked around, then got back in the pilot's seat. He had slept almost three hours.

Wright asked Alexander to shoot a location fix with the sextant. He confirmed that we were where we were supposed to be. Buckey had been keeping up with the navigational radio signals from South America.

Van Bogelen, the radio operator, said he had a signal from the Ascension Island base, and was trying to get one from Dakar. He was still getting a good signal from Natal. As soon as he could get the three signals, Alexander could pinpoint our exact location.

We were now six hours out of Natal. On the ocean surface we saw a vessel. It looked so small from the air, out in this great big ocean. It was amazing to think that the vessel was days from land, and we were only six hours from land. I sure would hate to be on that vessel out in the middle of all this water, I thought.

The sky was beginning to get a lot darker in front of us. Visibility was still good but the air above us was dark. Wright noticed that the leading edge of the wings were getting shiny. "Damned if we're not in a sand storm out here in the middle of the ocean," he said. As I looked out the waist window, I could see that we were cutting through thick air or something. We were leaving a

trail behind the wings as we cut through the air. It was better than thirty minutes before we were out of the sand cloud.

Now the sun and sky were bright again. We had passed through the dust cloud at an altitude of 8,000 feet, half way across the ocean. Wright said, "It must have come from the Sahara Desert." Cook and I started transferring fuel from the bomb bay tanks to the main tanks, keeping the main tanks balanced with fuel.

There were six main tanks in each wing, plus one Tokyo tank in the tip of each wing. Two tanks in the front of the bomb bay had been added to extend our range so we could get across the ocean. They extended our flying time to about twelve hours.

Our flying time had been just under eleven hours. Wright asked Alexander, "Where the hell is Africa?" Alexander said, "We should be seeing it soon." Wright said, "Find it. We should be there now."

Alexander was using the sextant, then going back to his charts to do more calculations, then back to the sextant. Wright said, "My God, Alexander! How can we miss the continent of Africa?"

Fuel was getting low. We had about ninety minutes of fuel left. Cook checked the fuel gauges. I was beginning to worry. I went to the flight deck. Cook and I checked the fuel gauges again. The fuel was too low for comfort.

Van Bogelen said, "We are getting a good radio signal from Dakar. I think it is north of us." Wright began picking up a signal on his command radio set. Dakar had to be near.

Finally Alexander gave Wright a heading, north and east of our present course. Wright agreed with him. Soon, in the eleventh hour of flight, there was land. Africa at last. We followed the coastline for twenty-five minutes and there was the Dakar airfield. Boy! What a relief to everyone.

The land in Africa was barren as we followed its coastline. There would be a little village with huts and a picket fence around the village. There were a few trees, small and twisted and far apart. The coastline was rocky and there was not much beach. There were very few signs of life anywhere, other than little villages with only four or five huts in them.

We were now making the landing approach to the airfield. It looked to be a good sized base. I confirmed the wheels down and locked, flaps down. Everyone was in landing position. As we swept over the end of the runway the engines were throttled back and we touched down. There was a loud roar and the ship dipped to

the left. The runway felt soft. The strange roar continued. I thought for a moment that we had lost a tire and I braced myself. The airplane slowed down and braked and then turned at the end of the runway.

I looked out the window at the runway, wondering what we had sat down on.

The runway was made of steel plates with slots in them and locked together.

This was the first time that we had ever sat down on a steel plate runway and I hoped it would be the last.

The landing had disturbed Wright almost as much as it had me. When Wright touched down, part of the runway was spongy, causing the ship to be unlevel.

It was a good feeling to be on land after being over only water so long.

The airplane taxied onto the ramp, following a Jeep. Wright parked the airplane and cut the engines.

Several soldiers met us. They wanted to buy watches and hose or anything else we had brought with us.

I sold all the Coca Colas I had, except one, for three dollars a bottle.

The watches went for triple the amount that Cross and I had paid for them. They would give you any amount that you wanted for the women's stockings. I sold all but four pairs and one watch.

One of the soldiers said, "Sergeant, you can get a lot more for them when you get to England." I thought I was getting enough for them here.

Cook and I looked the airplane over. The leading edge of all the propeller blades looked like they had been sand blasted. The leading edges of the wings and tail looked the same way. Even each side of the nose of the ship looked that way.

The sand storm that we went through in the middle of the ocean really had given us a sand blast job. Even the engine cylinders and cowling were sand blasted. The airplane was beginning to look old.

We unloaded and went to the operations building for assignment and briefing. As we left, black French guards were around the airplane.

The operations officer told us to guard our airplane at all times, as long as we were on this field. "The guards here can not be trusted," he said. Referring to the other nationalities that were here, he said, "Do not trust anyone. There have been several aircraft

sabotaged on the base. So act accordingly. Wear your weapons at all times."

We agreed among ourselves to each take a four-hour shift so we would have more time around the base. The officers and our passengers said that they would take a duty also. Dabbs wanted the first turn at guarding. I think he was trying to make Brownie points with Wright. The rest of us went to the mess hall, then to the barracks and to bed for it was now early in the morning and still light. "It must not get dark here," I said.

I fell asleep and got up for the next guard duty at 4 a.m. I was to guard from 5 to 9 a.m. I went to the ship and relieved Dabbs. When I got to the airplane, Dabbs was asleep in the bomb bay rack on top of the baggage. There were two black guards by each wing tip of the airplane.

I tried to talk with them, but I didn't understand much of what they were saying. They would smile more than talk. I sat under the wing of the airplane for a long time, watching the guards and the action taking place along the ramp. There were groups of French and English soldiers that would pass every once in a while. The American soldiers were doing all the work, driving the motorized equipment around and working on the aircraft. The fuel truck came by and fueled our airplane. I signed for the fuel. I finally got up in the cockpit and sat in the pilot's seat. The French black guards waved at me and smiled every time they passed the front of the airplane.

At 0900 hours, Cook showed up, right on time. He said we could pick up passes to go to town from the operations office. "Wright said he didn't care what we did, just as long as we pulled guard duty," Cook said.

I walked back to the barracks and ran into Cross. He said his guard duty didn't come up until night, so we picked up a pass and went in to the town of Dakar. The Army had buses that would take you to town every hour and, later, return you to base. The military police at the gate said there was a curfew after dark and all soldiers must be back at base by 7 p.m.

Cross and I rode the bus. We got out on the main drag in Dakar where the bus would be when we wanted to return to base. We walked down the main street, taking everything in. The city had a few big buildings. Most were less than three stories tall. We could see long rows of apartment buildings with balconies in the distance. The streets were lined with typical French architecture, the type buildings I had seen in those old Foreign Legion movies.

One part of the town was the French Army Quarters and another part was the English Army Quarters. We walked from the French area to the other end of the town and the English area. I guess the American area was everywhere else. In one part of the town, young Arabic boys would come up to you and ask for candy or gum. One little boy, about twelve years old, followed us for a while and finally said, "Wanta fu'kee my sister? Only two American dollars." We both told him to get away. He kept repeating it and then said, "You not scared. She very, very clean." Cross swung his arm at him and made him run. As we walked on down the street, we would see old men, wrapped in dirty cloth, lying on the sidewalk. Others, walking along, would just stop and relieve themselves in the street. Some would just go on the curb.

We walked into a restaurant to get something to eat. When we got inside and started to sit down, I knew the smell wasn't going to let me eat. Cross and I got up and started out. There were several American soldiers, sitting there, drinking and eating. As we reached the door, two French looking women asked us to join them. I tried to ignore them and we walked on out. I told Cross, "You can go back in, if you want to, but I wouldn't touch them with your hand."

Down the street we walked. We were afraid to go into another restaurant, so we headed toward the French Army area. As we walked, young Arab boys tried to stop us and sell us their sisters. Some were as cheap as one American dollar bill.

Most of the kids spoke some English and could carry on a pretty good conversation. One very young boy tried to take up with us. He wanted to hold Cross and my hands as we walked. I asked him if this was the French area. The buildings were all tan stucco with palm trees inside walled yards. The young boy said, "Yeah! French soldier, he no damned good. English soldier he no feeky good. American soldier, very damned good." Of course, he was getting gum, candy and money from the American soldiers, things he couldn't get from other soldiers. Cross said, "I wonder what he says when he is with the French and English."

We finally had to run this little fellow off. He insisted that he was going to take us to his two sisters. If we didn't like them he would find two other girls for us. Cross and I went on back to the bus pickup area and rode back to base. I had not seen much of the city but I had seen all I wanted to. The palm trees were pretty and the weather seemed to be nice but the natives were far from civilized. They lived in filth. Dakar was a good place to be from.

When we arrived back at the base, everyone was around, except Dabbs. He had left for town early that morning and he finally showed up, long after dark. Dabbs had all kinds of weird stories to tell. He said he had been in the same restaurant we had visited briefly, but left in the company of two French women. They took him to an apartment building somewhere, where they met still another woman. He said he had been with them all day. Dabbs was about half drunk and didn't really know what he had done.

I spent most of the next day, going over the aircraft with Cook. The cowlings were removed and the engines inspected for sand damage. The oil coolers had to be cleaned. That was about all that was needed. Cook and I thought we had better take good care of this airplane for it had to take us to where we were going and maybe take us back home, some day.

Wright came by and told us to go by operations, that they wanted to pay us. When we arrived at operations, some of the crew were already there. The pay master looked at our records and gave each of us some money. It was more than I expected. He said it was near payday and that we might still be in transit when the regular payday came, so we got some pay in advance. He paid us in American money. I questioned him about the high amount. He said, "No, with your overseas pay, flight pay and travel pay, it comes out right." I wasn't going to argue with him. I took it. This was the first time that I had this much money since I had been in the Army.

I passed the rest of the evening playing cards with Cross. We played Black Jack and put a limit on what we could win or lose and stuck to it. The rest of the crew played poker and had a real game going. Dabbs was doing pretty good in the game. I just wouldn't play cards with Dabbs because he was too slick. Cross, Tyler and I were the Black Jack players and tried to keep our games small.

Dakar's nights were cool. I now had written six letters to Elizabeth that had not been mailed. I was sure that all her mail to me was going to Army Post Office 634, in care of Station 124, somewhere in England. When I got there I should have all kinds of mail waiting for me. I just kept on writing to her.

My neck was almost well. The swelling was gone. I washed it with alcohol every night. I had about used up all my medicine, and was glad to see my neck getting well. The thing was going to leave a small scar on the back of my neck.

It was November 22. Wright and Buckey came by the barracks and told us to be at operations at 8 a.m. We were leaving at 9 a.m. the next day.

I was up early the next morning. I showered and shaved, picked up my personal kit and went to the airplane. Cross and Cook came just behind me. We looked over the airplane. Lieutenant Wittman, guarding the airplane, was half asleep in the cockpit. Cook, Cross and I went to the mess hall and then to operations.

Briefing started at 0800 hours. The next leg of our trip was across the Sahara Desert and through the mountain pass to Marrakech, French Morocco. We would not have oxygen on board so we would have to go through the mountain pass at an altitude of 5,000 feet. The elevation of the mountains was about 6,000 feet.

Everyone returned to the aircraft. All the crew helped pull the props through. I guess everyone felt like pressing on. We all were petting the old girl. I should say "the new girl." I think we were falling in love with our airplane. The B-24 was looking better all the time. She was our home. She was becoming first in our lives - a part of us. It was like falling in love all over again. The old girl was growing on us, and we were not about to mistreat her now.

Everyone loaded up and went through the preflight check. We were ready to go. There was no delay in getting off the ground. This flight was going to be about seven hours long. The aircraft was lighter because we did not need to carry fuel in the bomb bay tanks. At a maximum weight of 57,000 pounds, the airplane needed 5,000 feet of runway to take off. We weighed 41,000 pounds. The steel runway wasn't much longer than 4,800 feet. As we rolled down the steel runway, it made one heck of a noise. I knew what was going on, this time. We lifted off normally and headed north for Marrakech. The terrain looked brown and dry around Dakar below us. There were palm trees in and around the city. Most of the buildings in the city were a yellowish mud color. We turned north, into the African interior.

In about a hour, we were crossing a ridge on the face of the earth running east and west. The earth dropped off into a whitish brown sea of sand. There were sandy waves and shadowed ridges. You could imagine that they were moving, like the surface of a sea. As far as the eye could see, there were waves and waves of sand. Several hours had passed when Wright said on the intercom that there was a caravan on the ground, coming up in front of us. It was going to be on our right, at the 2 o'clock position. There was a line of animals and human beings walking through the desert. Boy!

What a place to be taking a walk. They were miles and miles from anywhere. We passed them and they soon were out of sight. They just blended back into the sand.

Most of the crew and passengers slept. They were lying all around the aircraft, anywhere they could find space. Tyler and I watched the terrain out the waist windows. With the guns installed, there were no covers for the windows, leaving the waist open to the wind and the elements. As I leaned against the gun, looking out the window, I wondered why in the world the Germans had fought the Allies over this damned land. Only a few months ago, they had fought for it and lost. Nor did I know what we wanted it for.

Oh, yes! We were now using it to fly over and supply England.

The air was warm, even at the altitude that we were flying. The air was coming up around the ball turret opening in the floor as well as through the windows. The ball turret is never dropped down unless we are using it in combat. When it is down, the air drag is great and causes the use of too much fuel.

After six hours and thirty minutes of flying time, large mountains began to appear in front of us in the distance. Now and then, as we began to get out of the desert and into rocky terrain, I began to see round holes on the ground with rock walls around them. Alexander said they were water holes with stone walls. We passed over a small village at the edge of the desert near the base of the mountains.

We were entering a mountain pass. We were flying at about 5,000 feet. The end of the wings were too close to the mountain sides to be comfortable. Below us and on the flanks of the mountains, we saw the remains of airplanes that had crashed. They had been left where they flew in. One of them was a B-24, lying there with its tail and wings broken off. The crashed bomber wasn't much of a help in cheering us up. We continued on through the mountain pass, watching every rock and cliff.

As we were leaving the mountains on the other side of the pass, there was Marrakech ahead of us. Round water holes could be seen all around it as we approached the city. Small green trees were beginning to break up the barren and rocky land. From the air, we could see large numbers of green trees growing in the city.

We began letting down and soon were on the runway. We followed the Jeep to the ramp and parked. Wright cut the engines and we were welcomed to Marrakech by an American ground crew. It was hot, and I do mean hot, when I got out onto the ramp. We

went over to operations and were assigned to a tent area in some small trees no taller than our tents. They were little olive trees.

There were three bunks in each tent. Cross, Tyler and I occupied one tent. Cook, Dabbs, and Van Bogelen took the tent next to us. One of our passengers, Sergeant Michael, was with another group in the next tent. The officers were in tents, just down a path in the same olive grove, not far from our tents

The ground in the olive grove was rocky and sandy. The trees were short and crooked, more like bushes than trees.

The guards on the base were all American personnel and plenty of them. The operations officer had told us that we would not have to guard our aircraft, that the base military police would guard it. "You'll have to identify yourselves when you want to go to your ship," he said.

It was now getting late and we all went to clean up. The latrine was in a large building near the tent area. It was very clean, with warm water and showers. Arabs cleaned the buildings and grounds. As we passed them they smiled but wouldn't talk much.

The mess hall served a good meal for supper. We were told to bring our mess kits, that we would be using them to eat with. As we finished eating and went out the door, there were several large cans lined up and filled with steaming water. Standing behind each can were Italian prisoners doing the clean up work. We were to dump our scraps in the first can, then move on down the line of cans, dunking our mess kits in the hot water in each can. As I started to dump my scraps, Arabs rushed up and grabbed the scraps before they hit the can. This was a real surprise and shock to see these people grab for food scraps.

Several American military police were trying to keep the Arabs away but there were too many to control. The Italian prisoners of war would look at us and grin. I believe they would have cut our throats if they had been given a chance. They were serving food and doing all the kitchen work.

It was getting dark when we got back to our tents. The sun had gone down and the air was getting cold. There was one lantern in each tent. The cots only had two blankets on them. I put them around me for a while but I was still cold. I thought maybe a hot shower would help, so I went to the latrine and took another good hot shower. After I came out I was as cold as ever. I had thought it would never be cold on the equator and in the tropic zone. I sat on the bunk in the tent for a while, trying to write a letter to Elizabeth, with the two blankets wrapped around me.

## An Arab Merchant

An Arab stuck his head in the tent. He wanted to sell us some wood and make a fire for us. Even though there were a lot of trees around, there was no wood to burn. The trees were clean and clear of branches above your head. The Arab had a big bundle of wood on his back. He wanted four American dollars to build a fire with the wood. We tried to beat him down a little but he wouldn't come down. We made up the pot of four dollars and gave it to him.

The Arab built us a fire in the middle of our tent. There was a little hole in the top center of the tent where smoke could get out. The wood made a small fire and the three of us began to warm ourselves by it. We told the Arab to put the rest of the wood outside and watched him lay it down.

The fire was warming the tent up pretty good. As the fire started to burn down, Cross went outside to get more wood. He stuck his head back in and asked, "Where did that Arab put the wood?" I looked. The wood was gone. I went to the next tent and asked if they had our wood or any wood. Cook said, "Yes. It's outside." I looked behind their tent. No wood.

The damned Arab had sold the same wood to everyone in the tents and built a little fire and got away. I said, "Well, he was a smart cookie." Dabbs said, "And a dead cookie if he comes back for I will shoot him."

As the fire began to die out, I said, "Dabbs will not have to worry about shooting that Arab for he will not be back until the next group passes through here. Then he will do the same thing again."

It was getting cold again. It was hot in the daytime but cold when the sun went down.

Cross said, "Let's go to the airplane and get our heavy flying clothes. I am about to have a chill." I was so damned cold that I was shivering. The three of us ran to the ship and put on our heavy pants and jacket. As the sun came up the next morning, the temperature became very pleasant. What a contrast in day and night temperatures. Cross and I took our heavy clothing to the aircraft and met Dabbs. We all walked back and cleaned up. While we were taking a shower, an Arab walked into the latrine. Dabbs said, aloud, "I am going to shoot me an Arab today." The Arab heard

him and ran out of the latrine. Dabbs wouldn't have to worry about that Arab, at least.

After showering, we went to eat. This time I filled my mess kit with food so that I would have plenty of scraps to give to the Arabs as I left. After eating, I walked out the door and there they were. I held my mess kit out and one Arab cleaned all the food from it with both hands. I took two oranges from my pocket and threw them to the others who were being held back by the military police. I washed my mess kit and then we headed for the operations building.

The operations officer said we could have passes to go to town if we wanted them. We would not be leaving until tomorrow. He said if we did go to town, the Old City area of Marrakech was off limits to American soldiers. "There is no one to protect you there," he said. Cross and I got the passes. We made sure that our .45 automatics were loaded and in our shoulder holsters. We took off for town.

An Army bus took us to the center of Marrakech. We got out and started walking. This was our great pastime whenever we were in a town. The streets of the city were very wide and pretty with a strip of greenery down the center. There were orange trees growing along each side of the street. The city was clean and pretty. I told Cross, "Why in the world don't they eat all these oranges that are on these trees if everybody is so hungry?" I soon answered my own question. I reached up and pulled an orange off and peeled it. I took a bite of the orange and it drew up my mouth like a green persimmon. What a taste. I learned that the oranges were wild oranges and were not edible.

Around some of the little shops there were olive trees and flower gardens. Along the street the shops were pretty and clean. Cross and I walked to the old walled part of the city and looked through the arch that the street went through. On the other side of the arch the streets were small and Arabs were everywhere, sitting on the walls and in the street. They waved to us to come on through the arch, and we waved back. I turned and said, "Let's get away from this place." Cross said, "Hey! Don't leave me here." We walked back up the other side of the big wide street and ran into John Van Bogelen, the radio operator. Van Bogelen walked on up the street with us.

We saw a nice little restaurant and sat in the garden area at a table. There was a nice table cover and napkins. First class. A Frenchman came to us and asked if we wanted wine and something

to eat. He spoke broken English and we could barely understand him. The Frenchman soon brought out wine, bread and cheese. Then he came with salads, fruit, dates and olives. Then there was more. He came with sauces, meats and vegetables. Everything was very tasty and very pretty, the way it was prepared. I ate a little of all of it. Then there were sweet breads brought out. We told him no more food, please, and paid him. We must have given him more than he was asking because he kept thanking us and patting us on the back. I gave him another dollar and I thought he was going to hug me.

We learned from some other airmen that there was a castle nearby that had been turned into a museum. It was worth seeing and, if we went back to the square, an Army bus would take us to it. It was a good deal so that was next. We got on the bus at the square and rode a short distance to the museum. There was a big double road leading up to the very large and pretty building that was covered with mosaic tiles. It had been a palace. There was real grandeur throughout, statues, mosaic pictures, gold and silver. It was all so beautiful. The grounds were unique to the countryside with olive trees, orange trees and other bushes well taken care of.

After the tour through the palace, we walked back to the city square. On the way back we were stopped by a Frenchman in front of his small house beside the road. He couldn't speak very much English but we could make out what he was saying. He had been well to do in France. He and his wife had escaped to Morocco. Part of his family had been killed by the Germans. He hugged the three of us and introduced us to his wife. He wanted us to have wine with him. I tried to tell him that I didn't drink but it didn't do any good. We all took a little glass of wine that he brought to a little table in his yard. He was so glad that the Americans were there. He hugged and kissed us and then his wife kissed each of us. His wife kissed me on the lips and it kind of embarrassed me. The Frenchman hugged us again as we were leaving. It was a short walk back to the square where the bus was waiting. We went back to the base.

The day had been very nice and the people had been nice to us. We saw a few French women but they all were being escorted. There were groups of Arab women wearing veils and long dresses and robes. There were not many people on the streets. Once in a while we would see a car with a large bag on top of it with a stove on the back bumper. The car was running on the flue gas from the

stove. I was told that they burned anything that they could get their hands on to produce the gas to run the engine.

When we arrived back at the base, Cross and I said we were not going to spend another cold night in the tent so we moved out to the bomber and made us a bed in the plane. Instead of sleeping, we both found ourselves running back and forth from the airplane to the latrine. It seemed as though the food we ate in Marrakech at the French restaurant had caught up with us. It was passing through us like water from a fire hose through a bucket without a bottom in it. We both had a good case of diarrhea. I was beginning to wonder how I was going to fly in this condition.

By morning, things were a little better with the diarrhea problem. The aircraft didn't have a latrine or anything for this purpose. There was a rubber tube to relieve yourself at each position but that could only be used at low altitude and when it was used the fluids would be sucked over the front of the ship and all over the pilot's windshield. This was due to the negative pressure air flow along the bottom of the airplane in flight. At high altitude it was useless because it would freeze and a foul ice would be all over you. So the best thing to do in flight was to wait until you were back on the ground. This made our steel helmets serve a lot of uses, for things other than covering our heads.

It was now the morning of Thanksgiving Day. We were all back at operations early, being briefed on the next leg of our flight. We were to take off as soon as possible. The destination would be St. Morgan, England. The operations officer warned us that, as we approached the Brest Peninsula area of occupied France, to be extremely careful of false flight signals. False signals were being sent out by German transmitters. We were to challenge every signal with the colors and code of the day. We might be approached by enemy aircraft in this area. We were told to be on the alert at all times. The operations officer was dead serious about everything he was saying.

## First Encounter With Enemy

The Germans, using false radio transmissions, had obtained a number of new B-24s and other aircraft by making the crews think they were landing in England while actually they would be landing on the Brest Peninsula of occupied France. The Germans had made

the airfield at Brest look like an English airfield, with American trucks and planes parked on it. Well, this was a turn of events, to think that the Germans could get you without firing a single shot. The operations officer said, "You may run across long range English fighters in the area as well as German fighters so be sure you identify the airplane before firing your weapons at it." I thought, "With all this information we were only going to get twenty rounds of ammunition per gun."

There would be seven hours of flying time to England, all of it over the ocean.

Our aircraft now was more important than ever to us. Everyone on the crew was now talking to her, babying her every way he could.

We lifted off soon after briefing without much being said by anyone. There was some high terrain to clear, just northwest of the airfield, and then we were out over the ocean.

After about two hours of flying, Dabbs tried to tell us all about his experiences in Marrakech. He said he had gone into the Old City and had spent the night with an Arab girl. It was impossible to tell what Dabbs would do, or even if he was telling the truth about his adventures.

Wright told us on the intercom to secure the fuel gauges and shape up. "Get in your positions and stay there," he said. "Call out anything that you see until we get where we are going. All play stops here. Confirm your positions." Lieutenant Wittman stayed in the waist with Cross, Tyler and me. Dabbs got in the tail turret. Alexander, the navigator, got in the nose turret and Cook in the top turret. The clouds were getting thick above us and spotty around our altitude. Wright was picking his way around the clouds.

Van Bogelen said over intercom, "I am getting strange radio signals. I believe we are being jammed." Wright confirmed that he was picking up two different homing signals. Alexander, the navigator, was hollering, "Stay on the course that I gave you and you will stay away from Brest. Don't change it. The hell with the signals."

Everyone's eyes were glued to the sky and clouds. Suddenly Cook in the top turret said, "Fighter! Fighter! Ten o'clock high in the clouds." A sudden chill went through my body. I kept watching at 10 o'clock over the top of the left wing. Lieutenant Wittman was standing behind me saying, "Look. Look. In the clouds. I see him." He pointed. "There he is." I saw him about the same time. All the school training began going

through my mind. "Identify. Line up wing tips on 70 mil sight. When wing tips are on outer ring, pick up at 1,000 yards. Track down 600 yards. Line up ring and bead on target hold position. Cone of vision now 70 yards at 1,000 yards. At 600 yards A,B,C, give lead and fire. At 150 yards fire point blank."

"Identify" was my brain's first command. It looked like an Me-210. Two tails. Two engines. Let his wings fill the sight. Wait. Wait. Identify, came my brain signals. Hey! My mind was telling me that I was seeing four engines and two tails. Lieutenant Wittman was screaming behind me, "Shoot. Shoot, for God's sake. Shoot." The wings now filled my sight and I started to lead. Reflex made me squeeze the trigger but nothing happened. I suddenly hollered over the intercom, "B-24. White B-24. Hold your fire." Top turret confirmed with, "Hold your fire." Lieutenant Wittman was still screaming, "Shoot." He wasn't connected to the intercom.

I said to myself, "Thanks goodness, my gun didn't fire when I squeezed my trigger." I looked down and saw that I still had my safety on. The white B-24 turned out to be a PB2Y-1, the Navy's version of a B-24. It was equipped with .20 caliber guns, fixed and turret. It had more fire power than we had. I kept it to myself about my safety being on. I always kept it in that position. Cross looked at my gun and said, "Is your safety on?" "Yes," I said.

What a relief that the fighter scare turned out to be a Navy patrol aircraft. He was running from cloud to cloud and must have had some very good radar for he was coming straight for us. We had only known that he was out there from visual observation.

I really began to believe that God was going to be with us. This little event, and the way I felt when I first saw the airplane, was beginning to make me think about what we are here for.

The next two hours went by without incident. We were all dead serious now. There was cloud coverage above us several thousand feet. The ocean below had lots of white caps and was dark blue in color.

Buckey came through on the intercom and said, "Land in sight. It won't be long now." We were soon over land. In a few minutes we saw the airfield. We prepared for landing, made the approach low and touched down. We were now in England. Wright taxied to the ramp. We passed several aircraft and parked next to a B-17. It was the funniest B-17 that I had ever seen. There was a B-24 nose turret mounted in the front of its nose. A cut down

version of a ball turret under its nose. An Emerson top turret in the center of the fuselage on top. Two .50 caliber machine guns in its waist. I asked one of the ground crew, "What in the hell is that?" He said, "We experiment with everything here. The modified B-17 is going to be used as an escort aircraft with the other bombers. Several of them will be in a bomb flight. It's another idea on how to protect our bombers."

We checked in with operations. The first thing the health officer asked, was if anyone had diarrhea. He said some were picking it up going through the tropics and it dehydrated you. Cross and I kept our mouths shut and no one else admitted that they had anything.

As soon as debriefing was over, everyone rushed to the latrine.

We were to meet at the airplane to find out what was next. Cook, Tyler and I looked over the airplane. The old girl was in good shape. The fuel truck came by and we fueled the ship. The fuel crew called the fuel "petrol."

Wright, Buckey and Alexander came from operations and said that we were not too far from our home base and we were going on to our field. Our destination was to be Station 124, a place called Tibenham, England at the little village of Tivetshall. It was northeast of London about 225 miles, near the city of Norwich. Now I knew exactly where I was going. I was as lost as a goose. All those places sounded strange to me.

We all got back in the aircraft, taxied out and lifted off the runway. There was a grey cloud coverage at 12,000 feet. We were flying at 3,000 feet. The countryside was green and had small farms divided by hedge rows on all sides. The flight was going to take about an hour and half. The anticipation of getting to where we were going was now growing in each of us. This world traveling was about to come to a end.

As we flew over the English countryside we would see, every once in a while, a castle on a small hill. It would be outstanding from the surrounding area. The trees and fields were so green. We began to pass several airfields and they all looked the same to me. I was beginning to wonder how we were going to tell which was ours. When we got within ten miles of the field, Wright would be able to pick it up with our G-Box. Wright soon picked up the field and made a pass over it. He talked to the tower and confirmed that it was our field and came back around and sat down on the runway.

A Jeep met us at the end of the runway and we followed him to a dispersal area which would now be called a hardstand parking area. There were a few B-24s already dispersed around the field.

Seeing the other airplanes was the first indication we had that we had been flying with other bombers. We had been spaced at such intervals that we had not seen one another during the whole trip.

We all got out of the aircraft and into an Army truck that took us to the operations building. The driver showed us where the briefing room was. We were met by several officers and were told that Jimmy Stewart had not arrived, as of yet. The officers welcomed us and asked if everyone was all right. One of the officers said he had arrived this morning. There was no news about the aircraft that had gone down out of Puerto Rico. Group Sergeant Major, Master Sergeant Robert O'Hara, was a passenger in Lieutenant Poor's ship that had been lost. The ground personnel related closely to O'Hara. He had been a very likable young man.

Operations told us they arrived on the field November 4, and the Germans had visited every night since November 6 with an air raid. The field had not had a direct attack but large fires could be seen at night in the distance. They said you would see enemy airplanes in the beams of the searchlights. Antiaircraft fire could be heard and seen everywhere. The operations officer told us to keep our steel helmets close by, and to use the nearest shelter if we could find one. Boy! This was going to be new to us. The officer told us we had missed Thanksgiving dinner but they would try to make it up tomorrow

We rode to our barracks area, got out of the truck and walked down a new walk to a little hut. It was called a Nissen hut. The area was still under construction, and everything was about half finished. We learned from the truck driver that it had rained every day he had been on the base. It was drizzly and damp when it was not raining. The truck driver took us back to the aircraft to get our gear and bring it back to our barracks.

We unloaded the airplane and put the officers and our personal baggage in the truck. I walked around the airplane, patting her on the wheels, talking to her like she was alive. "Well, old girl, you brought us half way around the world safely. Now keep on taking care of us." I really felt like kissing her. I patted the side of the B-24 and got in the truck.

We rode by the officers quarters which were about a quarter mile from our Nissen hut, and left their baggage. Their quarters were about like ours.

The truck driver took us on to our quarters and we unloaded our baggage at the hut. The Nissen hut looked like a big corrugated culvert pipe that had been cut length ways and turned upside down onto a slab of concrete. I walked into the hut. Inside was room for two crews, six bunks on each side. Two light cords hung from the ceiling with a little light bulb on each. In the middle of the hut was a little pot bellied stove.

"So this is going to be home," I thought. This cold damp hut. Oh, yes. The two ends of the hut were bricked up and had a door in each end. At least we had a freshly poured concrete walk from the roadway. It passed by the latrine and then came to our hut. So we didn't have to walk in the mud to get from the road to the hut and latrine.

I picked out a cot in the center on the left side near the stove. As damp as it was, I wanted to be near some heat. The pecking order for cots became Dabbs in the first one, then Cross next, me in the third by the pot bellied stove, then Van Bogelen, Tyler in the fifth and then Cook in the sixth, next to the back wall. We stacked up the cots on the other side to give us more room in the hut.

The next thing was to find the latrine and take showers.

Cross and I looked around outside. There were two unfinished small buildings just off the road, facing the walk, and several large huts a good distance away to our right as we went out the front door of the hut. There was one small hut to our left, about the size of ours. On the other side of it was a barbed wire fence area with a few little coal piles inside it. The two unfinished buildings were latrines. There were only two showers and two face bowls in one building. The other had four commodes. The water was cold in all the faucets. We couldn't find a heater of any kind.

Cross and I were like two prospective buyers looking at a home to buy. We were investigating and criticizing everything. This place was going to be far from the comforts of home. We met another crew member who had just moved into one of the big huts. He told us where to find the quartermaster building for the 703rd Squadron. He said to go down the road, turn left and then go about 3,000 yards and you would be there.

Cross and I could see the three buildings in the distance. We both agreed that if we cut across the field behind our hut it would be a shorter distance to walk. It looked like a pretty green field of short

green grass or wheat. I started across the field with Cross behind me. In about the third step we both went down to our knees in mother earth. To call it mud was an understatement. I said, "That is the last time we will ever try to go across a damned field here." Cross and I tried to get the mud off of each other and then went on down the paved roadway.

At the quartermasters, we checked out eight Army blankets and one pillow each and went back to the hut. When we walked in the hut, the others thought we were bringing their blankets to them. I said, "Hell, we went to get these blankets to keep us warm." The crew in the big hut told us that eight blankets wouldn't be enough cover to keep warm in this dampness. I continued to make up my cot with the eight blankets.

The rest of the crew left the hut to go get their blankets. One of them had built a fire in the little pot bellied stove and a little bit of warmth was coming from it. I went back out to the latrine and tried to get some more of the mud from my shoes and flight suit legs.

It was getting late but it was still daylight. "It must get dark here real late," I told Cross. "We are on some kind of double time here," he said, without explaining.

When the others returned, Cross, Tyler and I went looking for the mess hall. I put my heavy sheepskin-lined flight boots on over my shoes to try to keep them dry. We still had our flight suits and light leather flight jackets on. We soon found a path at the end of the road that led to the mess hall and operations. The path had plenty of muddy spots on the way.

At the mess hall, the mess sergeant told us we would have to go to the ground crew area to eat. They had a field kitchen set up. He said to take our mess kits and canteens. We walked back across the mud path to our Nissen hut and got our mess gear and then walked to the ground crew field kitchen.

The field kitchen was serving C rations. The food looked like some kind of hash of very finely chopped meat and potatoes. It really looked like someone had already eaten it once. It didn't taste all that good but it had been a long day and we hadn't eaten since early this morning in Africa. It seemed that it had been such a long time since breakfast. "Today is Thanksgiving and this is our Thanksgiving Dinner," I said. After we tried to eat some of the food, I dipped my mess kit in the big cans of boiling water several times and shook them off, then folded it up. Cross and I then walked back to the hut, not saying much.

I think he was thinking about our Thanksgiving Dinner like I was. "This is a far damn cry from my home cooked Thanksgiving Dinner," I thought.

By the time we got back to our tent, the cold and dampness was beginning to get to both of us. The fire in the pot bellied stove had burned out. Both of us started looking for something to build a fire with.

Outside of the back door was a concrete box with a lid. I opened the box and there was a little pile of coal and one or two pieces of wood. I picked up some of it and Cross tried his luck at building a fire in the pot bellied stove.

If it hadn't been for the bottle of cigarette lighter fluid that Cross had, we never would have gotten the coal to burn. The coal was cold and damp and was hard to get to burn.

The damned little stove would only put out about a foot of heat around it, even when we had a good fire going. We couldn't put more than a handful of coal in it at a time. The little stove was about eighteen inches tall. With its legs, it stood about two feet off the floor.

I got out my long handles and my toilet kit and went to the latrine. I tried to wash a little and brush my teeth. There wasn't a light in the latrine and it was cold and damp. The damned water was like ice. I didn't know how it could be so cold without having ice in it.

I went back to the hut and put my long handles on and got under the eight blankets. I laid my fleece-lined jacket over the blankets and put on two pair of socks. I got back up and laid my overcoat over my jacket. Here I was, in my new home. Everyone was complaining about the dampness. It made you cold, just listening to them.

I saw that it was going to be a long and miserable night in my new home.

## Now They Tell Us the Bad Part

"Robbie! Robbie! Robbie! Stop the damned daydreaming and get off your butt and help me find how to make this place livable."

Cross was hollering at me and hitting me on the shoulder.

I was in deep thought, sitting on the end of my bunk, feeling some warmth coming from the pot bellied stove. "Wonder, how I came to be here?"

My whole Army life had just passed through my mind as if it were happening all over again.

Cross said, "Get up and get your uniform on and let's eat. Then we'll find something to fix this place up."

I took my steel helmet to the latrine and filled it with water. The latrine was so damned cold. I came back to the hut and took the eye off the little stove and set the steel helmet in the hole. The water was soon hot and I shaved and washed in it. In fact, I almost took a bath in the hot water. It felt so good and warm when I washed with the warm wash rag.

I soon was dressed and Cross and I walked to the mess hall. We had powdered eggs with chopped ham and plenty of fruit cocktail to eat. The fruit cocktail was the most pleasing thing there.

The ground personnel all had a Turkey dinner the day before we had arrived and now they all had diarrhea.

Several crews had arrived in the late evening of November 25 after we did, with more arriving early this morning. More planes were arriving. There were many more airplanes around the airfield now but very few flight crews in the mess hall.

There were only one or two officers in the mess hall on the officers side of the room. The serving line divided the enlisted flight personnel's eating area from the flight officers eating area.

Cross and I walked out and looked at our airplane after mess. The airplane was a good three quarters of a mile from the mess hall. We returned to the hut and started cleaning it up. Cross and I found some boards and nails at new construction sites. I built a shelf on the wall behind the head of my bunk, using my knife as a hammer. Cross made a shelf by his bed, too.

I put Elizabeth's picture on the shelf beside my toilet kit. I fixed a place by my bunk on the wall to hang up my clothes. It was beginning to look pretty good. We just didn't have enough light. I told Cross that we had to do something about the light.

When I went to the noon meal I looked for the mail room and finally found it. I mailed the stack of letters to Elizabeth that I had been writing every day for the past two weeks.

Cross and I roamed the base during the evening, trying to find out where everything was. There were still a lot of unfinished buildings but no one doing anything. The noncommissioned officers club wasn't built. The officers club was about half

finished. The headquarters buildings, control tower, mess halls, and one hangar were finished. Another hangar was being built.

Most construction in the ground personnel area was finished. Construction was lagging in the air crew area. It would be the last area to be completed.

In one of the unfinished huts I found a roll of electric wire, light sockets and electric tape. I picked them up and took the electric stuff back to my hut and put it under my bunk. I wasn't sure what to do with it. Cross came in that evening with an old radio he got from an English workman somewhere. Our idea now was to accumulate all we could that would make this place like home.

On November 27, Wright and Buckey gave us a schedule of the briefings we would have to attend. That night, all flight crews met for a briefing.

Jimmy Stewart and Colonel Terrill had arrived and welcomed us all to the airfield and told us what we would be doing for the duration. Colonel Terrill introduced us to a high ranking British officer. The officer was on a British bomber crew and had been a fighter pilot. He was very military. The British officer welcomed us to England, and said that he was glad to see us here in his homeland.

The officer began to tell us what air warfare was like and how heavy we would find the enemy anti-aircraft fire. He called it flak. I sat there listening with the rest of the crews. We were all spellbound by his every word. With his British accent, he said, "Yanks, the black bursts will be 88 mm shells. The 105 mm shells will make white bursts. When you get a burst near you, it will go *karrup* and then you will hear small pieces of steel hitting your aircraft."

In all my schooling, no one had told me about anti-aircraft fire or flak.

The officer said, "There are 39,000 anti-aircraft guns on the western front. There are more than a million men serving the guns and making up anti-aircraft gun crews, searchlight crews and barrage balloon crews. Ten percent of all the enemy population give all their time to the air raid services. The bloody German fighter aircraft are bloody well frightening to us all. There are enough of them for each one of you to have several. So pick yours out when you can."

The British officer was telling it like it was. If this guy had been teaching our school in the USA I believe there would have been fewer of us here.

The British officer went on. He said, "The Royal Air Force will be out there helping you at night and you will have some of our Spitfire fighters alongside you. So, Yanks, this bloody war's outcome is up to you. The daylight raids over enemy territory have cost one in every three American daylight bomber crews. So change that number as quickly as possible. Thank you for being here." He saluted us and turned and walked out the door.

"Boy!" I thought. "This guy really tells it like it is." Everyone was very quiet. The operations officer got up and said, "Well, I can't top that." Then he briefed us on how to get things ready to fly combat missions. He said that we would soon have a few check flights to see if we still knew what to do in an airplane and if we could find each other in the sky.

Jimmy Stewart finally got up and said, "Well, boys. I - You've heard the British officer. I - uh - think he told it like it is. I can't think of any more to say. I am kind of of stunned, too. We will just have to see what we can do about all of this. I - think the - uh - intelligence officer wants to talk to us."

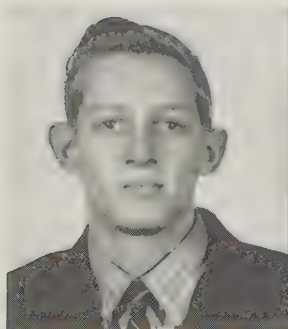
The intelligence officer passed around several different types of escape kits that we would be carrying with us on missions. They were to be used in case we went down in enemy territory. There was an escape kit for different countries and different sections of those countries. The kits had the latest charts of military installations. They charted the best escape routes to take to get out. Pills were included to pep you up and keep you going if you needed them. Each kit had a compass and had money for the country that you were flying over. All this was in a little plastic package about four inches square and half an inch thick, to fasten to your parachute harness.

The intelligence officer said, "You will have several types of passports. We will issue you the passport you'll need for the country you will be flying over. There will be pictures taken of each of you and I will be telling you how you are to look for the pictures to be put on your passports."

Escape routes were pointed out on the large wall chart of Europe. The officer said that if we were on the ground, the only information to give the enemy was our name, rank and serial number, regardless of how the enemy might treat us. "Do not carry your personal wallet or pictures of anyone from your home," he said. "If you have a picture, tear it up before you hit the ground. If the enemy finds a picture of anyone at your home, he might say that bodily harm will come to them if you don't cooperate."



Tennessee Dottie, ready to make heavy deliveries.



Civilian dress photos, carried on combat missions to help airmen evade capture if they are downed while over enemy territory. E. O. Cross, the author, and George Wright.

"There is an underground in France. They will try to get to you first, before the Germans do. If you are down in France do not use your weapon. You might shoot people who are coming to help you.

"If you are down in Germany, that will be a different story. If the German Army picks you up and finds any weapon on you, other than a military weapon, or if they find lead ammunition on your person, they will shoot you on the spot. Only military weapons are acceptable to them on a soldier. If you are down in France, you will see civilian people wearing American airmen clothing that they have obtained from downed aircraft. This will help you to become one of them."

All of these instructions were beginning to be filed in my brain to be withdrawn at a moment's notice. I was wondering why they waited to the last minute to tell us all about the bad stuff.

Again, in all the schooling in the States, none of this kind of stuff was told to me during training. Maybe they didn't know all this stuff then, or didn't want to scare anyone.

As I sat there trying to remember what I had just heard, another officer stepped up. He said, "I am the medical officer, and there are several things that you need to know.

"You will be given three small vials of morphine in a small packet that will attach to the sleeve of your flight jacket. If you are wounded, or someone on your ship is wounded, use one vial to help relieve the pain. Use two vials if you need to keep the patient silent. Use three vials in quick session to kill yourself or your patient. That choice would be your decision to make. Make it right. Use three vials yourself only if your decision is to kill yourself, for some reason.

"If you have an idea that you will be returning to base within three hours, do not put sulfur or other medication on the wound. We only have to clean it up when you get here.

"If you are not returning within that time, then all the rules change. You are on your own. Just be a good doctor."

Everything was now falling into place in my mind. They were not kidding. "This thing is beginning to add up to be damned serious business," I was thinking.

After briefing, we were off to the mess hall. The mess hall was now full of flight crews. I had to stand in line to get mess. Most of our crews had now arrived from the States.

We would soon be ready to carry out what our "Friends and Neighbors" had intended.

When I arrived at the hut, I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

Dabbs had a pot bellied stove almost four times as big as the stove that was there before. He was carrying it in his arms as he walked into the hut.

Dabbs set the stove down and began taking our stove out. I helped to connect the big stove to the flue stack. I said, "Dabbs, where in the world did you get this damned stove?" The answer was, "I wasn't going to freeze another night so I requisitioned it." "Where?" I said. He said, "From where they are building the officers club." "My God!" I said, "You mean you stole it from the officers club?" "No," Dabbs said. "I requisitioned it." He picked up the little pot bellied stove that we had disconnected and took it to the officers club.

When the other crew members came in the hut they couldn't believe that we had a large pot bellied stove. Everyone wanted to know where it came from. I said, "Dabbs requisitioned it."

Before the evening had gone, we had burned all the coal that we had in our coal box, which was supposed to be our week's supply.

When the fire was beginning to get low, Dabbs said. "I got the damned stove. Now, someone else will have to get the coal to burn in it."

The coal pile was behind the next hut to ours. Cross and I thought that when it grew dark, we would see what could be done about the coal.

The coal yard had an eight-foot barbed wire and chain link fence around it. We tried to figure out how we were going to get over the fence while carrying coal. I looked around, found a ladder and some boards in one of the unfinished buildings, and I borrowed them.

When it was dark enough, Dabbs and I put the ladder on the fence and Cross and I went up the ladder and jumped over on the coal pile. Then Dabbs handed us one end of the board and we placed it from the ladder to the coal pile for a walk so we could get back out.

Now to get the coal out over the fence and to the hut.

Cross and I started throwing coal over the fence. I told Dabbs to be on the lookout and if he saw anyone to tell us. We continued to throw coal lumps, one at a time. The next thing I knew, Dabbs was gone. We threw as much coal over the fence as we thought the box in our hut could hold. Cross and I walked the

boards from the coal pile to the ladder and down the ladder to the outside of the fence. Now to carry it to the hut.

We started to pick up some pieces. Out of the darkness came Dabbs with a squeaky wheel barrow. "Where in the hell did you get the wheel barrow?" I said. "Don't worry about it. I found it. You want me to take it back?" "Hell, no!" Cross said.

We loaded the wheel barrow and in a few trips we had the box behind the hut piled high. We had to throw some of the coal back over the fence.

We didn't want anyone to see how we got the coal. So Dabbs hid the ladder, boards and wheel barrow somewhere in the field behind the huts.

The hut was a lot warmer. We could feel heat from the new stove three feet away. It still didn't warm the complete hut but it was at least beginning to dry out the hut one hell of a lot better. I still had eight blankets on my bunk. I put four under me and four on top, along with my overcoat and jackets.

We were all proud of our bigger stove and plenty of coal to burn. The problem was how long we would be able to supply it with coal.

We had more briefings during the next few days. We received some new equipment: oxygen masks, heated suits, throat mikes and head sets. We were to check over all of our flying clothes and equipment and get it all in working order. We were cautioned by the briefing officers not to overlook anything.

Someone had decided that we should learn personal self-defense. We had to attend classes on Jiu Jitsu and the use of other tools of personal aggression such as a piece of wire, a rope, a string, and our shoe strings, plus other methods of hand to hand combat. The instructor said, "In this business, everything is fair play. Never give your enemy the benefit of the doubt. Just use force to kill."

Each one of us tried the mat with the instructor. The guy would put me on the mat every time I got near him. I was on my back before I knew it. I had been a lightweight boxer in high school in the Golden Gloves and thought I could protect myself. I just couldn't hit him. He would put me down. I thought, "I had better stop trying to hit him or the guy will kill me."

The weather was beginning to clear up a little. The drizzling had stopped.

I found it hard to write to Elizabeth with the dim night light we had in the hut. It was just not enough to see by. I began to pull

out the wire from under my bunk that I had been saving, to see what I could do with it. I installed a switch, a light socket and a bulb on the wall at the head of my bunk and Cross' bunk. I didn't have enough wire or sockets to get to Dabbs' bunk. Dabbs got his neon sign from the aircraft and hung it in the hut by the entrance door. I couldn't make it light because it was for lower voltage than the English used. We had hauled that sign all the way from Sioux City. I thought maybe I could find some way to make the sign work later.

Our hut was now beginning to have some of the comforts of home. With a few more improvements, as I found time, there was no telling what we all could do to the hut. The light by my bed was a great improvement. I could now read my small Bible, once in a while, and write to Elizabeth. The only lonely time of the day now was when I was lying there in the evening, writing to my wife.

With the weather getting better, there was talk about check flights. Some of the crews had already started being checked out for combat readiness.

The next few days went by with the same routine, briefing meetings, eating, and trying to make the hut more livable.

Keeping enough coal to feed our big new pot bellied stove was our biggest problem. Someone had stationed a Limey guard on the coal pile behind the fence during the daytime.

I found out that the coal behind the fence belonged to an English company and they were selling the coal to the Army Air Force as it was issued out. This was going to be a problem. It was going to take some late night work to get at the coal.

The walk to the airplane from the hut every day took up a great deal of time. I wanted to keep up with what the ground crew and their chief were doing to our airplane.

Cross and I thought it was time to name the old girl. We got the crew together and couldn't decide on a name because everyone had a girl they wanted to name it after. We all finally came up with "Bullet Serenade." Cross came up with a pretty girl's picture. Cross and I drew her on each side of the nose of the airplane. I outlined her body and Cross did her face. Cross then painted her. We then printed "Bullet Serenade" beside the girl.

It was a real masterpiece. Now our lady, No. 42-64439, had an official name. The ground crew painted a big white star on her sides by the waist windows, and new stars on her wings. The lady had a new white circle on each tail with a big black "F" in the middle of the white circle. This was going to be our bomber group's identification when we were in flight. The old lady was real

pretty with her war paint on. Her top was dark olive drab. and her belly was light olive drab. I was just hoping that the crew would be as ready as she was.

On the late evening of December 4, we had our first visit from the German Air Force. We were all around the pot bellied stove. Cook, Tyler, Dabbs, and Van Bogelen were about to start a game of poker.

The air raid warning sirens started wailing.

We all just about jumped out of our skin. "What the hell!" said Dabbs. Everyone rushed out the door to see what was happening. We watched the skies as several searchlight beams were swinging back and forth, trying to pick up the enemy airplanes. I could see some of the searchlights converging on an aircraft high in the air. English guns were firing at the airplane in the distance.

It seemed that everything was going on to the east of our base. There were loud booms and then we could see fire glows in the night sky in the east.

Other searchlights now were converging on an aircraft that was high in the sky over our airfield. The airplane flew on as though nothing was firing at him, going to the east at very high altitude.

We continued to watch the searchlights for some time as they cut through the dark night.

None of us really knew what to make of the air raid. This was the first time that we really knew that someone was the enemy. We kept on watching the sky. The All Clear sounded and the searchlights went off, one at a time. The sky was dark again.

Everyone walked back to the hut. We all began to talk at once as to what we had seen. Like a big bunch of nuts, we all just stood around outside, watching.

I had wired Cross' Limey radio to operate in the last couple of days, and he was picking up "Axis Sally" so we could listen to the music. It was better music than the music on the American Armed Forces station.

Suddenly a sweet voice came over it and said, "This Is Calais One, Calais Two, Bremen, Freeman, and Luxemburg. I want to welcome all the new airmen arriving in England. We want to give you a warm reception.

"I know your sweethearts and wives are missing you."

Then the soft music would start.

She knew how to get to you.

## Jimmy Stewart's Shakedown Flight

On the morning of December 5, a Jeep stopped by the hut, and a sergeant got out and came in. He told us we were scheduled to fly. We were to report to operations in the briefing room at 0900 hours, dressed out and ready to take off.

Everyone rushed to get their flight gear on. It was almost that time now. We arrived in the briefing room together. The officers were already there. We were told that we were going on a shakedown flight, to find out if we were ready for combat flying. Everyone rode out to the airplane together. We checked over the aircraft just as if we were going on a combat mission. We signed off the aircraft from the ground crew chief. Everything was done by the numbers.

We were ready to pull out of the hard stand, when a Jeep drove up, and Captain Jimmy Stewart got out.

"Fellas, I'll be riding with you," he said.

Stewart got into the aircraft and went to the flight deck. Wright taxied to the end of the runway. We went through the check list by the numbers. Everyone was on the ball. Down the runway we went and a we had a good lift off.

Jimmy Stewart walked all through the airplane, checking us all out, and returned to the flight deck. On the intercom he asked each crew position questions about our routine. He asked me, "What are you were doing now, Sergeant Robinson? What do you see out the waist window? Can you see the supercharger gate position? Are the exhausts smoking? What color is the engine exhaust? How much fuel do we have on board? Are you checking it? Are the fuel gauges off and drained?"

Stewart wanted to see each engineer on the flight deck. I went forward. Then more questions. "Robinson, can you fly as first engineer? Can you operate all turrets? Can you arm the bombs?" He had a question about everything. Stewart really knew this airplane. He wanted us to know it, too.

Stewart took Wright's position in the pilot's seat and put Buckey through the routine. We were to create a formation with other aircraft. We all would be forming on a lead ship. The lead ship would be painted orange with black checks. Everyone was looking for the formation and the lead ship. It never did show up. Not even a formation of any kind.

There was a thin cloud coverage and we flew up through it. We were all on oxygen. Buckey said the temperature was minus thirty degrees Fahrenheit. Stewart asked if all our heated suits were working properly. The flight test lasted four hours and fifteen minutes. We approached the airfield, touched down and made a perfect landing.

Stewart nodded in approval of Wright's smooth landing. "Good."

Wright taxied back to the hard stand, and we all got out of the airplane with a sigh of relief. Stewart got out and we were all sitting around under the wing, waiting for someone to come to take us to operations.

As we sat there, Stewart said, " Well - I suppose you fellas are going to make it okay together. I - just don't know where the - uh - forming airplane went to today. Anybody see it? Maybe we can find it next time. They told me it was going to be there. Right where we were. I just don't know what went wrong with them."

The truck arrived. As we bounced back to operations, Captain Stewart said, "These truck sure don't ride very good, do they? They're almost too rough to sit on."

I kept wondering if we did everything right. "I guess we will hear from it if we didn't," I thought. We were soon at operations and out of our flight clothes.

The rest of the day, I lay around the hut, writing letters and playing Black Jack with Cross. Writing letters to Elizabeth was getting to be the main event of my day. If only I would receive a letter from her and know that my angel was all right and doing well.

On the morning of December 9, after heating a helmet of water on the stove top, shaving and taking a bath in the helmet, I walked to the mail room to mail the letters home that I had been writing.

There was a stack of letters waiting for me. All from my wife, except one from my aunt. I spent most of the day reading my letters. The latest letter had been written only six days before.

Elizabeth was working the evening shift at the aircraft plant, making B-25s. She was getting home by midnight and still driving the car. Elizabeth had a car pool with several other girls who lived near her. The only trouble was that the tires on the car were not going to last much longer. There was another small problem at home. The hot water heater was not working and Elizabeth had turned it off because it was leaking. There was no one she could get to fix it. She was heating hot water on the kitchen stove, she wrote.

I didn't know what I could do about getting the heater fixed. I wrote to one of the old engineers at the hotel where I had worked, and asked if he could help get the water heater fixed. The letter would take at least ten days to reach him. That was the only thing that I knew to do.

After lunch, Cross and I walked by the mail room and then stopped by the finance building to see why we had not received our pay. It was now December 9 and we should have been paid on the first day of the month. The finance officer told us that he had not had the time to get to our pay records. He said, "You're not going anywhere. Come back next week." We had received some money in Dakar, but that was November pay.

We both walked out of the building, grumbling to ourselves about not getting paid. We walked on down the road, still grumbling. We ran into Jimmy Stewart. He must have noticed our expressions.

"How are you fellas doing?" Captain Stewart asked us.

Cross said, "Captain Stewart, we were just at finance to see why we had not been paid and the finance officer said to come back next week. He didn't have time to pay us." Stewart said, "You didn't get paid the first of December?" "No, sir," we chimed. "Well, now. Come on and we'll find out why he doesn't have time to pay you," Stewart said. We started walking briskly, side by side. Stewart had long legs and we had almost to run to keep up.

We all walked into the finance office together. With a clearing of his throat, Captain Stewart said to the lieutenant behind the desk, "Why hasn't Lieutenant Wright's crew been paid?" The lieutenant said, "They will be paid, sir, but it will take a few days to get to it." Captain Stewart put his hand to his chin and started rubbing it. Then he said, "Lieutenant, we just don't have a few days. I believe we ought to pay them right now. Not in a few days. I mean kinda like, now - in the next thirty minutes." Stewart looked at the lieutenant and then at us. He said to the lieutenant, "I will be back in here in a little while and, you know - if Lieutenant Wright's crew isn't paid by then, I believe that we will just have to find a new finance lieutenant for this one will be on his way out of here to the Infantry."

Stewart told us, "Stick around a few minutes. I think he is going to pay you now." Cross and I said quietly, "Thank you, sir." He half way returned our sharp salute and said, "I'll see you around, fellas." Then he walked out of the finance office.

The finance lieutenant said for us to sign on a piece of paper. He gave us a month's pay. "Tell the other members of your crew to come by here as quickly as they can and get their pay," he said. We took the money, signed the paper and got ourselves out of there.

I heard the finance officer say, "That damned Lieutenant Wright's crew. They had to get the squadron commander on top of me, and with all the other problems that I already have." We rushed back to the hut and told everyone to get over to finance and pick up their money. We all were beginning to think this Jimmy Stewart was really an all right guy.

To our surprise, when we arrived back at the hut from the finance office, another flight crew was moving into the hut with us. I wasn't sure that I liked this idea. We had had the place all to ourselves since we arrived.

Late in the evening, the squadron's master sergeant came by the hut. He told us to be ready for another training and check flight on the next morning. He said he would get us up early that morning.

We stayed up late, talking to the new crew that had moved in. Their pilot was Lieutenant Medcalf so we started calling them The Medcalf Crew. All but one of their crew members seemed to be very nice. The odd one was kind of like Dabbs. He didn't really care about anything. Maybe he was a little worse than Dabbs. It looked like two of a kind. Of course, there always had to be a Dabbs on every crew. Dabbs was nice but his morals were questionable, or maybe he was just sex crazy when it came to women. Well, that was the same way with this oddball guy on Medcalf's crew. Just two of a kind.

Morning sure got there early. The master sergeant woke us up. It was still dark outside. I looked out the door and it was drizzling again. We all got up and put on our flight clothes and walked the muddy path to the mess hall. There were several flight crews in the chow line when we arrived. I thought, "This air base is starting to get crowded." There were powdered eggs and plenty of fruit cocktail to eat, with tea or coffee to drink. The fruit cocktail was the most pleasing part, this early in the morning.

We finished dressing out and went to operations and briefing. We were to take off and join a formation, then fly out over the North Sea and return to base. We were dismissed after briefing. Trucks took us out to the airplanes. The old girl looked kind of pretty in her new war paint. She was all ready for us. The ground crew had already pulled the propellers through for us. We were

carrying no bombs or ammunition, only fuel and a full crew. Wright started the engines and pulled to the taxiway. There were eight of us lined up for takeoff.

Each took his turn down the runway and lifted off. Everything worked well, except the weather. Visibility was about one mile. We lifted up through the drizzle and rain, through the dark gray clouds, and there was a beautiful sun shining down on the white blanket of clouds below us. Boy, did that sun look good. We soon could see aircraft forming on a black and orange checked B-24 leading the pack. It was no time before we joined the formation.

Jimmy Stewart was piloting the lead ship. He was steady. We formed as the second lead, just under and back of Stewart's left wing man. The formation was good and tight. Wing tips were about twenty feet apart. After we had formed, the checked B-24 pulled away. Then another group formed and pulled up behind our group. They had a circle "H" on their tails. Our tails were marked "Circle F."

We climbed up to 20,000 feet through a cloud front and out over the ocean. Through breaks in the clouds, we could look down and see the ocean. The formation made several large turns and then we were told to return to the airfield. We flew in a loose formation down through the clouds. When we got back to the airfield, each airplane in turn peeled off, circled the field in a flight pattern and set down on the runway. We had been in the air four and a half hours. Everything went well. Everything worked.

After a short briefing we went to our newly assigned lockers in the flight crew locker room. We would keep all of our flying gear in lockers and not have to wag it to our hut through the mud.

Later that night, Wright and Buckey came over and sat by our pot bellied stove for a while. I don't think their barracks was as warm as ours. This was the longest visit that we had with them, up to this time. They thought the day's flight had gone well and we all worked together very well. They talked with us for a couple of hours. Wright was impressed by all our bright lights and Cross' radio. The radio music was good and Axis Sally was doing her thing.

The next five days found us in classroom briefings, self-defense classes and in some self-destruction classes.

There were three nights of air raids by the German air force. The weather would clear up at night and you could see the stars. With the clearing would come the German air raids. The Germans

would pass over our field but, so far, no attack was directed at our field. The last direct raid on our field had been on November 4, before we arrived. I thought, "I sure hope that's the way it stays."

Each time they came, we would run out to see what was going on and watch the searchlights.

We could hear the Royal Air Force bombers passing over, almost every night, heading for Germany. They would fly a single aircraft, not in group formations. On the night of December 12 we were alerted that the first mission of the 445th Group would take place the next morning. If we were to be one of the crews to go, we would be called early in the morning.

We all were so worked up about it that we sat and talked about going and played cards late into the night, trying not to think of morning coming. It was late before we turned in to get some sleep. I don't think I slept at all. It wasn't long before I heard the Jeep coming. I could hear it stop and then start. When he was in front of our hut he didn't stop. He kept on going. I said, "Did he pass us up?" Cross said, "I think so." I thought, "Maybe this is our lucky day." I must have dropped off to sleep for I didn't hear any of the ships take off. We all slept late that morning.

When Cross and I did get up, we went to the tower to find out what was going on. There were fifteen ships sent out on the group's first mission. It was the first day of operation for the group. The group had become operational in only twenty-three days after landing in Tibenham, the place of mud and cold rain.

The day brought an unexpected problem. Word was sent around that there was not enough water for the base. Water would be rationed. "Who in the hell is using that much water?" I thought. We each used two steel helmets of water a day to heat on the stove, and to drink a little. We flushed the commode in the latrine when it would work. It was too cold to use the shower.

With the amount of rain water that fell from the sky, we could catch enough to meet our needs. We were all discussing the water, standing around the pot bellied stove. I said, "Ground personnel must be using all the water. I think their latrines work. I can't see why the British can't furnish us with enough water. The sky has been gray and rain has fallen every day that we have been in England. I have only seen the sun when we fly above the cloud cover."

We all walked to the flight line. It was about 1500 hours. It was about time for the airplanes to return to the base from the group's first mission. Waiting around on the flight line kept us on

needles and pins, searching the skies for the airplanes to return. Someone said, "There they are." They swept in over the field low, in formation, then winged off into a landing pattern and began to set down on the runway. I counted only twelve planes. Fifteen had gone out. The tension was mounting. I thought, "Did we lose three ships on our first mission?"

We all rushed to the tower and there we learned that three had returned earlier with mechanical problems and were safe on the field. One of the returning crew members told us that some of the ships had flak damage. They had only seen a few German fighters at a distance. Cross and I walked out to one of the airplanes and looked it over. There were small holes around the bomb bay and waist window section. It looked like someone had hit it with an axe about every six inches in an eight-foot area.

On the morning of December 14, we were still discussing the group's first mission and the flak holes. Cross said, "Maybe if that is all the damage you get from flak, it will not be too bad."

Wright came by and told us that they were giving overnight passes if we would like to go to Norwich, the closest town. We could get off the base for a while. This was the first pass to town that we had since we had arrived in England.

Earl Doggett, Cross and I dressed up in our best uniforms. We picked up our passes and walked to the little train station at Tivetshall and rode the train into the city of Norwich. When we arrived in Norwich there were American soldiers everywhere.

The three of us started walking the streets of Norwich, looking at all the small shops. We stopped at one little shop and bought some hot fish and chips, a handful of fried fish and a handful of fried potatoes lying on a piece of newspaper. Most of the English people were friendly but very cool toward the Americans. Some called us "Bloody Yanks," which sounded kind of strange to us. The shop keepers would say, "Yea, Yank," or "Yea, Bloody Yank."

The money was something else. We knew a British pound was worth four dollars and three cents. It was just hard to keep up with a shilling, halfpenny, and pence. I would keep a handful of British change and when I wanted to pay for something I would take out the change and let the shop keeper pick out what he wanted. If he tried to take it all, then we would have to talk about it. As long as he didn't take it all, I would know that he was honest and taking the right amount. The lady shop keepers would be very careful about

the change they took from our hand, carefully counting out each coin.

As we continued to walk through the town we passed a theater. I asked when there was a show. It was to be a stage show in a couple of hours. We bought tickets and walked around, then came back in two hours. Walking up and down the streets in the flow of soldiers, we occasionally saw a young English girl walking with an American soldier. For every English girl that we saw, there were at least six soldiers looking for a girl to talk to.

We walked through several areas of the city. One area was all bombed out. Rubble was stacked high. I was beginning to understand what it meant when a place was bombed, seeing these shattered shells of buildings and the rubble. I talked with an Englishman who said, "We, what didn't get bombed as much as the other places, don't have it so bad." Well, it looked bad to me. There was just nothing left in some areas.

The three of us returned to the theater. It was very nice inside. The seats were very big and comfortable. There were a lot of English Home Guard soldiers sitting throughout the theater with their families. I sat next to an English Home Guard during the show. He finally introduced himself. He was a major. During an intermission, he introduced his wife, daughter and her husband, a captain in the British Army. I had several packages of American cigarettes that I carried around for such encounters. I offered him a package. He took it and thought I had done something wonderful for him.

The major became very friendly and gave me his name and home number. He asked me to visit him and his family sometime. His name was Major E. W. Lale, 14 Mile End Road, Eaton, Norwich. Phone, Eaton 485.

I really thought I had done something, meeting an English family like this. Just shaking hands with his wife and daughter made me feel good. Just seeing and touching a young woman's hand sent a chill through me.

The stage show was a love story, an operetta, and really didn't make much sense to me. It was entertaining and did have a lot of pretty blond girls in the show. The Lale family said goodbye and asked that I come and visit them when I could.

The three of us - Earl, Cross, and I - began to try to find some place to eat. We looked for a USO or Red Cross center but couldn't find one. We stopped in a pub that was full of soldiers and we each got a bottle of ginger. Then we went on down the street

and bought fish and chips. It was something to eat. We were sitting on the curb of the street, eating the fish and chips when a Bobby came up to us and started talking. He told us where we could find a Salvation Army Club for American soldiers. It was a few blocks down the street.

It was beginning to get dark now, so we decided that we had better find the Salvation Army Club. We were soon at the club. The English lady told us that a cot for the night would be two shillings. We paid her and she gave each of us a number which was to be the number of the cot we had for the night. The club was in a large old building. There was one large latrine where you could shower and shave. There were so many soldiers that it was almost impossible to get around in the place. The cots were about two feet apart.

We tried to sleep with our clothes on. We gave it up, sometime during the night. The three of us decided that we would find the Army bus that they had told us about, and ride back to the base. It was very dark outside. Everything was blacked out. We could hardly find our way around. We would run into someone walking and they would turn on their torch (flashlight) and shine it on the ground. Then we would hear a Bobby say, "Mind your torch, Yank. Mind your torch." We made it back to the Army bus. We sat in the bus for two hours but it was better than the cot at the Salvation Army in Norwich. It was some time early in the morning before the bus took us back to the base.

It even felt good to get back to the hut and lie down on my bunk. I was beginning to call it home. I thought all wasn't lost on the trip to town. I had met a nice English family. The next few days I spent washing clothes, underwear and shirts. All of us were beginning to smell bad. We were allowed only one bar of soap a week, and five packs of cigarettes and two bars of chocolate candy per month. I was accumulating the cigarettes and soap to try to trade for something that I might need.

An English construction worker came by the hut one day, and said that his wife would wash our clothes for one English pound and a bar of soap. I told him to come back and we would make a deal. Trying to wash clothes in a helmet was for the birds. I didn't smoke so I tried to trade for soap with those who did and wanted my cigarettes. I was beginning to see that horse trading was a pretty good deal.

Late that evening, Wright, Buckey, Kroll and Wittman all came by the hut. They hung around for a while and then told us that

we would be on standby tonight and tomorrow morning for a possible mission. Dabbs had not come back from town yet. Wright told us to have Dabbs come to see him as soon as he got back.

Dabbs got back after dark. He had all kinds of stories to tell. He told how he had found a good looking prostitute. I told him that Wright wanted to see him. He thought I was kidding. Then we told Dabbs that we were on alert for a possible mission tomorrow morning. Dabbs feathers dropped. He lost all his air real quick when he realized we were not kidding and were dead serious.

That night at the mess hall, none of us were very interested in eating. I knew that I was all butterflies. Cook, Cross, Tyler and I walked out to the aircraft after mess. It was being loaded with incendiary and general purpose bombs. The bomb bay rack was full of bombs. Our lady, Bullet Serenade, was ready - even if we were or not.

# Death Beckons

As we walked back to our hut, the drizzle was becoming a full fledged rain. We didn't seem to notice the rain falling. Our minds were on other things just now.

When we entered the hut, Dabbs was feeding the pot bellied stove with coal and its sides were red and glowing. Dabbs said, "I'm going to dry the damned hut out if I have to burn it down." It took us all to stop him from putting more coal into the stove.

After we began to all calm down a little, I sat on the bunk and wrote a letter to Elizabeth, telling her about Norwich. I tried to find a way of telling her that we were on an alert for our first mission. I turned out the light over the head of my bed some time during the night and crawled between the blankets. Six on top and four under me. It made a good sack.

It seemed that I had just fallen asleep when I heard the Jeep coming. It was like a twilight sleep. I heard the Jeep stop at the hut next to ours. Then it started up again and stopped in front of our hut.

The master sergeant came in and shook each one of us. He said, "Wright's crew. Try not to wake Medcalf's crew when you get up." Then he left the hut, got in the Jeep and drove on.

I turned my light on at the head of my bunk. I saw Earl and Dewey of Medcalf's crew turn over and look at me while I started to dress. Earl said, "Good luck, Robbie. God go with you." Earl was from Arkansas and was a religious young boy. I thanked him and said, "I'll see you tonight. Be sure to have the cards ready for a game of Black Jack when I get back."



USAF Photographic Collection

Jimmy Stewart confers with bomber crews.

Everyone walked to the mess hall together. It was now 0430 hours and still dark outside. It was foggy and the visibility was poor. I was thinking, "How in the world can we ever take off in this kind of stuff? Someone is losing his mind."

Several crews were beginning to arrive. There was plenty to eat. I just couldn't eat. There were too many butterflies in my stomach. The fruit cocktail and fruit juice were the only things I felt that I could keep down. We waited on each other and walked to the flight locker room together, as if there was some comfort in being together. For the first time, we were feeling that we needed each other.

All the kidding had stopped. Everyone's face was long and serious. In the locker room we all started dressing out for the flight. We began to help the other fellow with his gear as we dressed.

First, the long handle underwear went over my regular shorts and undershirt. Then the blue, heated suit that looked like a quilted union suit. The cord and plug sticking out made me look like a monkey with a tail. A pair of white socks next and then the electric heated slippers. Then plug the electric shoe cords into the suit plugs on each leg at the ankle. Over the heated suit came the flight fatigues.

In my left pocket I placed my Bible and my angel's picture. I thought of her as, somehow, a protective angel who would be flying with me. Over my flight fatigues I put on my dress uniform pants, shirt and light leather flight jacket. Next came my shoulder holster and .45 automatic. Next was my heavy, fleece-lined pants and my fleece-lined shoes. Then the fleece-lined heavy jacket.

I put into my flight bag my flight helmet, headset, throat mike, heavy gloves, May West life jacket, parachute harness, regular shoes, canteen, ammunition belt, boxes of emergency K rations, white silk gloves, heated gloves and a steel helmet. Cross and I went down our check list to see that we had everything.

I picked up my chest parachute and flight bag and we walked to the briefing room. We left our parachute and flight bags outside the briefing room door. We went in and sat down near the middle of the room. This was the first time I felt warm since I had been in England. Everyone on the crew was on time. Every crew that was going was in the room and everyone was quiet. No one had anything to say. Maybe everyone was so scared that they couldn't talk. This day in England, this Thursday, December 16, 1943, would be the day that all our training had been aimed at.

I tried to keep the fear inside of me from showing.

Someone said, "Attention." We all stood up. Several officers walked to the front of the room.

Jimmy Stewart was a head higher than all the others. When he got to the front, he said, "Sit down, fellas. At ease. This will be the group's second mission. Maybe it will work out like our first one did. Without too, too much damage. You know - maybe that first mission was our typical mission. Just be careful and do what - do what you are supposed to do today. All right?"

The next officer got up and pulled the curtain off the big wall map. There was a red line all over the map. That red line would be our flight path over Europe. Everyone said, "Oooooooooohhhh." The officer said, "The target today is Bremen, second largest city in Germany." He pointed out the route and the known flak concentration areas along the route. He showed where we would enter the enemy coastline, how we would wiggle around between cities, then turn and go over the target and back out into the North Sea and back to base. We were to enter the coast through the Zuider Zee. After hitting Bremen, we would fly out into the North Sea near the Elbe River. All the twisting and turning in our flight route was to confuse the enemy defenses.

The gunnery officer was next. He pointed out all the places that we would receive flak. When he got through pointing them out, I whispered to Dabbs, "He could just have said, 'You'll run into flak everywhere.'" The S-2 officer was next. He pointed out all the escape routes, in case we went down. He pointed to a harbor city and said, "If you can make it to Kiel without getting caught, there will be an ocean vessel in the harbor with a pair of red long handle underwear hanging on its deck. Get on that vessel and it will take you to Sweden. Do not let yourself be seen until the ship is away from port. Pick up your escape kits and passports when you leave the briefing room. They will help you to get through the country you go down in. There will not be an underground to help you in the area you are flying over today, which is Germany."

The weather officer took over and reported the expected weather. He said, "The weather on takeoff will be poor: fog with less than a mile visibility. You will break through the clouds and fog at 3,000 feet. Waiting for you will be sunshine and clear skies. It will be clear where you cross the English Channel and enter the coast. There will be a weather front of 10/10 coverage north of Bremen. The 10/10 coverage will be under you as you leave Germany and go out over the North Sea. Your altitude will be 23,000 feet and the cloud coverage will top off at 15,000 feet. When you return to base, the weather here will be good. Do not delay your estimated time of arrival at Bremen. If you arrive as planned, the city will not be overcast. A cloud coverage is expected to move in and cover the city shortly after you are scheduled to bomb it. Good bombing."

I kept wondering, How does he know all this weather stuff, without information from Germany?

Jimmy Stewart got up next and said, "Well, fellas. This is it. I - uh - I want you all back here safe. That understood? Fine."

Someone said, "Dismissed." We filed out the door at the rear of the room, past the chaplain and the medical officer. We picked up our escape kit and passport. A sergeant standing by the medical officer was giving out the three morphine vials that went on the sleeve of our flight jacket. The medical officer looked each of us over as we went out the door, and said, "Safe flying."

There were twenty-four aircraft sent out from our group. That was 240 men. Everyone was filing out of the briefing room in an orderly manner. No one was in a rush to get started. Outside, I picked up my flight bag and parachute. Walking to the trucks that were waiting for us, I was thinking, "Now I know how you would

feel if you have been condemned to die in the electric chair and have to walk to the chair." My feet were going one way but my mind and body were saying, "Turn around and go the other way!"

The ten of us on the crew got in the truck, still not saying anything. Everything just seemed automatic. The truck took us to the aircraft. We threw all our flight gear and flight bags out of the truck and onto the ground under the wing of our waiting bomber.

Our boxes of ammunition were still on the ground. We loaded five boxes of ammunition for each gun position and fed the gun belts into the guns. Ammunition for the turrets was already loaded. Cook and I checked over the aircraft and signed it off from the ground crew chief. Cook ran the load and balance and center of gravity. I checked behind him with the slipstick. We had 5,600 pounds of bombs. We had a full load of fuel for nine hours of flying time. We made sure our flight gear and everything was loaded on the ship. We pulled the props through, then got on board.

I started the putt-putt (auxiliary power plant on board). We all completed our suiting up. My May West life jacket went over my fleece-lined coat. Then came my parachute harness. Helmet and goggles went on my head, with headsets and ear phones in my helmet. The throat mike went around my throat. Morphine vials went in the patch on my coat sleeve. The gun belt went around my waist with my shoes tied to it. My steel helmet and canteen were beside me. My oxygen mask was hanging from my helmet.

I plugged my throat mike and headset cords into the intercom, then attached my oxygen mask hose to the oxygen demand regulator. I put my flak suit beside me. I would put it on when we got airborne. We looked like men from Mars or maybe like a bunch of Teddy Bears. We had about thirty pounds of clothes on. When we put on the steel helmet and flak suit we would have on about fifty pounds.

Wright started number three engine first because it provided all the auxiliary power. The hydraulic pump and auxiliary power plant made all the noise. I would shut them down on takeoff.

Wright started the other three engines and pulled out to the taxi ramp. The ground crew was standing by the plane, waving goodbye. Wright came over the intercom, asking each position to report. Everyone confirmed that he was ready. Buckey came on the intercom with, "There goes the flare from the tower! The mission is on!" We moved out in fourth position in a line of two dozen B-24 bombers, all dressed up in their war paint. When we got to the

runway, I walked through the bomb bay and cut off the putt-putt for Cook, then confirmed back at my position. I felt like a laundry sack, trying to get through the bomb bay to the putt-putt and back to my position.

When we started down the runway we couldn't see the other end of the field for the fog. We just knew that the runway was in front of us. The old girl was doing her best to get off the ground. We lifted off almost at the end of the concrete.

Our position in the formation was to be the lead of the second flight in the first lead squadron. The 703rd was to be the first lead squadron of the formation.

It was 9:05 when we lifted off the runway. It had taken five hours to get out of the sack and get ready for the mission.

The gears came up just as soon as we cleared the ground. Wright climbed through the cloud layer as quickly as he could, hoping not to meet another plane while we were going through the clouds. We broke out of the clouds at about 2,000 feet. There it was. The sun was shining bright. It sure looked good to see the sun once again.

There were aircraft forming in the sky everywhere. Wright soon found our orange and black formation aircraft. The three aircraft in front of us were forming on the chase ship. It wasn't long before we had all the Circle "F" ships in formation. Then the orange and black ship pulled away from the formation.

Now it was time.

We were beginning to climb to altitude. It looked like the 445th Group was going to be the lead group to Bremen. All of the B-24 groups were forming behind us. Off to our right a good distance, I could see B-17 formations parallel with us, and behind us at 5 o'clock.

Wright said on the intercom, "Get on oxygen." I buckled up my mask. Each crew member confirmed that he was now on oxygen. I helped Dabbs and Cross to put on their flak gear and they helped me get into mine. Then we put on our steel helmets. I loaded a shell into the chamber of my gun so that I could fire it if the gun froze. The shell in the chamber would break the ice loose when the gun fired. If it froze without a shell in it, I wouldn't have a gun that would shoot on the whole trip.

We were now at 15,000 feet and out over the English Channel. Wright said, "Check your guns and fire." We all fired several short burst with our guns and then confirmed.

I was now beginning to feel the cold. I made sure that my heated suit was turned on. I turned the rheostat up for more heat. I was beginning to feel its warmth in spots. Everything was now working like it should. My throat mike felt like it was going to choke me at times.

Wright said on the intercom, "We will be entering the enemy coast area in a few minutes." Cross got in the ball turret and let it down into combat position outside the belly of the bomber. Wright said, "Get the ball turret up. It drags too much." Tyler pumped the turret up. Cross opened the turret door but remained seated inside. I could see that the high altitude was getting to Tyler as he was hand pumping the ball turret up. I helped him pump and it was a job at that altitude. Cross and Dabbs got out of their turrets with oxygen walk-around bottles and went to the bomb bay and armed the bombs. They had forgotten to arm them before we took off. A little wire had to be pulled from the nose of each bomb. When they came back to their flight position, they reported bombs armed. It had not been on the check list. Now it was.

Cross and Dabbs, over the intercom, began to argue over who was supposed to pull the arming wires on the bombs. Wright said, "Cut the chatter. Keep your eyes on the skies." We were to have several sets of fighter escorts. The first escort was to be Spitfires, followed by P-47s. I was looking out the window, watching for the escort and any other little black dots that I might see. I began to feel cold again and turned the heat higher on my heated suit. I had not plugged in my gloves. I plugged them in and began to feel the heat on my hands. I asked the temperature and Wright said, "Thirty-seven below zero."

My gun was beginning to frost and turn white.

Ice was forming on my oxygen mask where my moist breath was coming out of it. I was breaking the ice away to keep it from closing up the discharge vent. I pulled my goggles over my eyes. Only a little skin on my face, between my oxygen mask and my goggles on each cheek, was now exposed to the frigid elements.

I punched Tyler behind me in the right waist position. He turned and looked at me. He had ice all under his mask, almost to his chest. I looked at Cross and he was the same way. Dabbs was sitting in the tail turret and I could only see his back.

Tyler reported three groups of Spitfires. They were in groups of four at 4 o'clock. The Spitfires made a sweep, well below the formation. Dabbs said he could see about fifty or sixty

aircraft behind us, all B-24s. He said, "I don't see any B-17s anywhere." We had passed them, way back there.

We were now over the Zuider Zee. We were just entering land near a river when five black bursts, one after the other, exploded right in our formation, just left and in front of the lead ship and in front of our left wing. *Karuuup, karuuup, karuuup, karuuup, karuuup*. I could see our left wing passing through the black smoke. Then came *klink-klink-klink*, sounds of steel fragments hitting the airplane, above the sound of the engines. The lead plane turned the formation sharp to the right, and five more bursts ruptured where we would have been if we had not turned.

The turn had put our left wing aircraft in the path of the first burst, just outside of his left wing. The left wing ship closed in tight to us. I could see his right waist gunner as well as I could see Cross sitting by the ball turret in our own aircraft. The waist gunner was waving at me and I was waving back to him. "Man, this is close," I thought.

This was my first taste of enemy fire. I could smell cordite gun powder from the flak burst, even with the oxygen mask on. I had the oxygen regulator set on demand, not pure oxygen. It was taking in some of the outside air and mixing it with oxygen. This was to save oxygen and use only the oxygen that was needed.

Ten bursts of flak. A little steel had hit the aircraft. Maybe this wasn't going to be too bad.

The formation turned again, back to the left. Tyler at the left waist and Cook in the top turret reported P-47s at 4 o'clock high. There were eight groups of four fighters. Four groups of four went over the top of us and four groups of four passed under us. Boy! Did those white stars on their wings look good. They stayed with us about five minutes, sweeping the skies in front of us and back under the formation behind us. Dabbs called out, "P-47s leaving. They are going back!"

Buckey said. "Be on the lookout for enemy fighters. When our fighters leave, theirs will show up."

To the left and right in front of us there was a solid black cloud of flak bursts at about our elevation of 23,000 feet. Tyler called, "Flak at 2 o'clock." Lieutenant Wittman said, from the nose turret, "That's solid flak in front of us! We are going through it! Can't that guy in the lead ship see? Damn! What is wrong with him?" Before Lieutenant Wittman got the words out of his mouth, flak was everywhere. It was above us, below us and beside us. Steel was hitting the aircraft like it was raining. Lieutenant

Alexander told Wright, "Keep this damned airplane as far right as possible and maybe we'll miss some of it."

Lieutenant Alexander said, "Our lead pilot is flying right over a flak area that is plainly marked on these charts. He must not be able to read his chart." In a few minutes, we were out of the flak area. "That was as much flak as you ought to receive at one time," I thought.

Cook called out over the intercom, "Single line of fighters 11 o'clock high." At the same time, Tyler said, "P-47s approaching at 3 o'clock." The P-47s passed over us and headed straight for the line of fighters approaching from 11 o'clock. I could see dog fights taking place at 11 o'clock at a distance. The enemy fighters, which looked now like they were Me 109s, had dropped to a lower altitude with the P-47s after them. The P-47s were knocking the Me 109s out of the sky. They were going down everywhere.

We were now reaching our IP and from here on we would fly straight and level toward our target. Lieutenant Wittman looked out of the nose and said, "My God! There is nothing in front of us but flak. Miles of it at our altitude. It's black at our altitude and white above us. How can anybody drop bombs through this stuff?"

The bomb run had started. Wright opened the bomb bay doors and the wind was coming through the waist around us like a gale. The bulkhead door flew open between the waist and bomb bay. We would drop our bombs just as the bombardier in the lead ship dropped his. I could see the solid cloud front just north of the city of Bremen that the weather officer had warned us about. I thought, "That guy knew what he was talking about." The solid front had not covered the city yet. We were right on time. A few minutes later and the city would be totally covered by those clouds.

The black flak clouds were a real contrast with the distant white cloud front behind it. Wright told Wittman he could drop the bombs when he was ready. Lieutenant Wittman, in the nose, said, "I'll tell you when the lead ship drops his."

Flak was now bursting so close to us I could see the shells flashing between me and our left wing man's ship and bursting yards above us. The shells were making a trail through the smoke of the other anti-aircraft bursts around us. It was like a big fireworks show.

The cordite smell was so strong that I had to put my oxygen regulator on Full Oxygen position to keep from getting sick.

Wittman said, "Hit the button for bombs away." After a moment, Alexander said, "Bombs away." The airplane jumped up

when the load of bombs fell out of the bomb bay. Cross came back with, "Bombs clear of the bomb bay. Close the damned doors." The quicker we closed the bomb bay doors, the more fuel we would save for getting home. The open doors were a real drag on the airplane.

Dabbs called out, "Flak hit a B-24 behind us at 6 o'clock. It has a Circle "C" on its tail. It got a direct hit! A direct hit! My God. Look. It's going down. Its going down. It's going down." Dabbs kept saying that, over and over again. I wasn't able to see it from the left waist. I was still looking at flak. The flak bursts were making the airplane bounce from the concussions. I had crawled so far up into my steel helmet that I must have looked like a turtle in a shell.

I was trying to cover my private area by pulling the flak suit down as far as possible. I didn't think that I wanted to be hit there. I looked up at the front side of the waist window at the fuselage and - My God! - there were slashed holes in the aluminum skin. I could now see holes ripped in the horizontal stabilizer tail section.

I began to ask God, "Help get us out of here." I looked out the window and down at the city. I could see the parts of the city burning as we were crossing over the cloud front that was now under us. We had made it across the target. Several miles away, when I looked back, the black flak clouds could be seen above the fluffy white cloud cover. New black smoke from fires on the ground was now rising through the white cloud cover

Our fighter protection was back around us. The P-47s were showing up in relays and sweeping the sky in front and around us. They were always in fours. They would fly together in fours, almost as if they were one ship.

I was beginning to feel that whenever I saw four fighters together in the distance, they were ours. As we flew along above the overcast, I could see nothing but clouds and our own P-47s.

The ice was getting thick on my flak suit and I kept trying to beat it off with my gloved hand.

The flak started again. This time, it was off to the side of us. We passed on by. Then Wittman yelled, "Here it comes again!" The next thing I knew, we were in the thick of flak bursting everywhere near us. It seemed that it took forever for us to get out of the flak area. It was not as thick as it was over Bremen but it was bursting too close to my airplane.

We flew through two more areas of flak before Alexander said we were crossing the enemy coastline. I didn't know how he



USAF Photographic Collection  
Each flak explosion is sending out 1,300 steel fragments.



USAF Photographic Collection  
Flak chops bomber in two.

could tell that through the heavy cloud cover. Each time the flak would start coming up, the P-47s would fly away from us. They didn't like it, either.

In our formation over the target we had twenty-four ships with Circle "F" on their tails. Dabbs took a count and all twenty-four were with us, the best Dabbs could tell.

The formation soon crossed over the edge of the cloud front and there was the sparkling ocean, in the clear below us. We could see England coming up in the distance. We dropped to 8,000 feet in altitude and then down to 4,000 feet. I took my oxygen mask off and turned my heated suit off. I dropped my flak suit and took off my steel helmet. I felt like I had taken off a ton of equipment. I took my gloves off, down to my silk white gloves. I opened my heavy flight jacket. England was getting bigger in the distance and it was good to see it there.

Wright asked for a damage report. Everyone reported everything they could see. It looked like all the damage was on the left side of the aircraft. I could see several holes in the tails and in the waist walls in front of my window. It looked like a few tears near the left wing tip. We had come through pretty good.

We had only put the ball turret down once and that was when Cross tested his guns. I had not shot another shot except for testing. The top turret had fired several bursts when fighters were reported at 10 o'clock. The enemy fighters were too far out and our fighters ran them off and shot several of them down. I could only say, "Thank God for our fighter pilots." I wondered if they would always be there.

Thinking about this damned flak was worrying me now. There was nothing that you could do but sit there like a duck, and take it.

We were soon near the field. The weather was clear, just like they had told us it would be. Wright peeled off and sat down on the runway. The ship taxied to our hard stand and parked. Wright cut the engines. I got out of the airplane and kissed the ground. The rest of the crew did the same thing, including Wright.

It was now 1500 hours. We had been gone six hours and forty-five minutes. All aircraft in our squadron had returned.

The ground crew was counting holes. I looked around and counted five that I could put my hand through and at least two dozen small finger-size holes. They were all on the left side of the aircraft. That was enough for me.

The truck picked us up and took us to be debriefed. We reported to the debriefing officer everything we had seen and then walked to the locker room and took our flight gear off and put it in our lockers.

We all left the locker room and walked back to our hut. We had learned from the debriefing officer that the flak over Bremen had been reported as the heaviest yet of the war. Our fighter cover was the biggest that we had ever sent out. New S-2 reports had just been received about the number of guns that had been fired on the ground at Bremen. The Germans had moved more than 900 anti-aircraft batteries into and around the city of Bremen!

Boy! was I glad to see the hut again. I fell down on my cot. I took Elizabeth's picture out of my pocket, with my Bible. I kissed my angel's picture and held the Bible. I thanked God for the safe return. I fell asleep there on top of the bunk in a strange exhaustion. It was dark when I woke up. Everyone else was asleep. I was still holding Elizabeth's picture and the Bible. I took my clothes off and got between the blankets. I had been completely drained by the mission. I wasn't the only one. Some of the others were still lying on top of their bunks, where they had fallen when they came in.

The next morning I was up about daybreak. I built a fire in the stove. It was raining again, drumming on the roof of the hut. The weather front had moved over the field some time last night. It was getting colder. The weather sure looked like it was going to be with us for a long time. While everyone was still asleep, I got out my little black diary and wrote about the mission to Bremen. My first mission into Germany, on December 16, 1943.

A Jeep drove up and the master sergeant came in the hut. He said the mess hall would be kept open late for the crews that flew yesterday. "You can have breakfast until 10 o'clock," he said. "By orders of Jimmy Stewart." I woke the others up when it got late, plus some of Medcalf's crew who were still in the sack. I told them about Stewart ordering that the breakfast line be kept open late for us.

Earl, Dewey, Cross, Tyler and I walked to the mess hall in the rain. Earl and Dewey asked us all about the mission yesterday. They acted like they wanted to know every detail.

After a breakfast of powdered eggs, diced ham and plenty of fruit cocktail, hot tea and toast, I walked back through the rain to the hut.

I put a steel helmet of water on the stove to heat. As soon as it was hot, I began to shave and clean up. The events of yesterday

just kept going through my mind - I could still see the flak holes in the ship and how close they came to me.

The rest of the crew was beginning to get up and stir around. Dabbs opened some K rations and began to eat them for his breakfast. He made his breakfast off a small can of cheese and ham. Cook and Van Bogelen did the same thing. I said, "Stewart has kept the chow line open for you." They just tiredly shook their head. They were smart not to get out in all the damned rain.

It was December 17. I thought, "It sure won't be long until Christmas."

During the evening, the English construction worker stopped in the hut to see if we had clothes we wanted washed. His wife was going to do the laundry for us every week. All my clothes needed washing good. He said he would bring the clean clothes back next Tuesday. I said, "How much did you say you wanted for doing the clothes?" He said, "Two pounds." I said, "You told me it would be one pound and a cake of soap." He said, "Well, Yank, how about one pound, a bar of soap and a package of cigarettes?" I said, "The deal was one pound and a cake of soap." He finally agreed.

I made a list of all my clothes and got his name and address and his I D number. He said, "Don't worry, Yank. You'll get your clothes back, clean and ironed. The bloody British Army would shoot me if I kept your clothes." I said, "You'll not have to worry about the British Army shooting you. I will shoot you on sight if you steal my clothes." I had my .45 in my hand. He picked the laundry up from all of us and started walking out the door. I stopped him and said, "If you do an extra good job on mine, you can have this package of cigarettes." I held out the cigarettes to him. He took them and said, "Don't you worry, Yank. I'll bring yours back and you'll say they are the best cleaned and iron."

The evening was spent writing to Elizabeth and thinking about yesterday's mission. I wondered how I could make things a little better on the missions. One thing was for sure. I was going to find me a piece of a flak suit and put it over an empty ammunition box and use it for a seat to protect my bottom end.

I thought, "I sure don't want anything coming up my hind end." I tried to do something about the skin on my cheek between my oxygen mask and my goggles. I was getting a frost bite streak on each cheek, under each eye, on the side of my face.

The next two days, we had to attend classes again on self-defense and escape procedures. No one in the crew talked very much. We were all still worn out from the Bremen mission. It had

taken something out of us. We were all humble, thankful to be alive.

Cross, Dabbs, Earl and I made another raid on the coal pile. It was raining and we guessed the British guard believed that no one would raid a coal pile in the rain. Cross said, "I guess the English do not play the game like we do." We took all of our clothes off and put on our raincoats. We went over the fence the same way as before. We threw the coal over the fence and hauled it back to our coal box in the hut.

On Sunday, it was still raining and turning very cold. In fact, the rain felt like ice. Wright showed up Sunday evening when we were all playing cards. He told us that we would be on standby for another mission the next morning.

Sudden fear, like a million nerves ends trying to shake my insides, came over me. With a forced smile, I said, "We will be ready if we are called out." Wright nodded. "See everybody at briefing. Try to get a good night's rest."

I knew that this night was going to be a long one.

## Back Into the Bremen Nightmare

We all stopped the card playing and crawled in the sack. Cross turned the radio on low and Axis Sally played us some soft, sweet music.

Sometime during the night, the rain stopped falling. I had heard every drop hit that tin roof of the hut for days. The silence was almost scary. I must have dozed off for the Jeep woke me up, breaking the night's silence with its starting and stopping. It was like expecting the coming of a death angel. The Jeep stopped in front of the hut and in came the sergeant. He said, "Medcalf's crew and Wright's crew are scheduled for today. Good luck." He walked out, and we heard him drive off. I looked at my watch and it was 4:30. Medcalf's crew was shocked for they had not been put on standby. This would be their first mission. I didn't have to shave this morning so I didn't get up and build a fire. Because I was close to the stove, everyone thought I should be the fire keeper.

I jumped up and put my clothes on real quick. Dabbs was hollering, "Build a fire." No one paid any attention to him.

It was cold but I was shaking from fear. Cross and I were the first outside. We went by the latrine and it was so cold that you

couldn't sit on the commode. We tried to wash a little in cold water and then went on to the mess hall. The fruit cocktail and its syrupy juice was all that I could eat. It seemed to settle my stomach a little. I sure didn't want any greasy food or meat. Not with me going to be at high altitude all day.

Cross and I walked on to the locker room and started dressing out to fly. The rest of the crew showed up about the time we were dressed to go. Dressing was a little easier this time. I had everything down in order. Cross and I checked each other over good and followed the clothing list that I had made and hung in my locker. When we were satisfied that we had everything, we waited around until some of the others were ready and then walked to the briefing room, something I wasn't very interested in doing.

The meeting began with the briefing officers walking into the room and someone shouting, "Attention." Everyone stood up as the officers walked to the front of the room. The last officer to reach the front of the room said, "At ease." Then we all sat down and briefing was about to start.

Wright had not shown up. The crew members kept whispering, "Where is Wright?" I asked Buckey. "He'll be here," Buckey said. After briefing had started, Wright walked through the back door and sat down beside me.

The briefing officer was pulling the curtain from over the chart on the wall. There was that red line all over the chart again. "No, it can't be. Not again," I thought. The red line was leading us back Bremen. The briefing officer said, "The target today is Bremen."

The briefing was now forming a pattern. They gave us the route we would fly, the possible escape routes if we went down, the type and amount of bombs we would carry, the heavy flak areas and locations, where to expect enemy fighters, the weather at takeoff and over the target, going and coming back, and at home base on landing. The S-2 officer would try to tell any of the latest events about the enemy that he knew.

The weather man said it would be good for flying today. A cold front had caused clearing over most of Europe and England during the night. It would be cold, near sixty degrees below at 23,000 feet.

We were dismissed. We filed out the rear door past a chaplain and a medical officer.

I walked outside into the cold dark night. I was almost numb. Not from being cold. My feet moved forward but my mind and body urged me to stop.

I asked God, "Please, give me the strength to go and not to show everybody that I am afraid. Please, give me the ability to think and to return to my wife some day."

I picked up my flight gear and got in the truck.

It was very dark as we rode the truck out to the airplane. Everyone in the truck was quiet. I felt a strange calm, as if in God's presence, as the truck neared the aircraft and stopped. Someone said, "All out." I got down out of the truck with my flight gear.

We checked over the airplane. She had some new patches on her fuselage and on both tails. All battle damage had been repaired. The old girl was loaded with 5,600 pounds of 100-pound general purpose bombs and 500-pound incendiary bombs. We had a full fuel load. Our ammunition was all in place. The ground crew had loaded it for us. The ground crew was beginning to baby us. Maybe they were feeling a little sorry for us. Even the bullets were already fed into the belt racks.

I finished putting on the rest of my flight gear. We all helped each other to get ready to go. The ground crew chief found me another flak suit and I split it with Tyler. We put it over two empty ammunition boxes so we could sit by our gun positions in the waist during part of the flight. We wouldn't have to stand up for all six hours. It would give us some protection for our hind ends, too, which was a comforting thought.

I plugged in my oxygen mask. I checked my electric suit to see if it was heating. I plugged in my throat mike and headset, made sure that my chute was lying nearby and that my harness was secure around me. I had my carbohydrate rations, (candy mints) and K rations. I was ready to go.

Cook started the putt-putt. Wright started up engine number three, then number one and two and four, in that order. Wright was going through the check list when the flare went up at the tower. The flare signaled that the mission was on. Getting ready to go was getting to be about the biggest job of the mission. After going through all the procedures of dressing and checking, I wanted to go on and get it over with, if I had to go.

The group was putting up twenty-six aircraft today. Wright taxied to the ramp and waited our turn to enter, then we pulled around the taxi strip to line up with the other aircraft. Twenty-six B-24s sat there, all lined up, with engines running. Cook asked on the

intercom if I would turn the putt-putt off as we reached the runway. I confirmed, unplugged my suit and mike and walked through the bomb bay to the putt-putt under the flight deck. When we were the next ship to take off, I turned the putt-putt off and returned to my position and confirmed.

Down the runway we went and lifted off. The wheels came up and we confirmed wheels up and locked. Forming the formation went well. The orange and black checked aircraft was there, leading the pack. As we approached the ocean, the orange and black checked aircraft left the formation lead. There were more aircraft in the sky today. To our right were B-17s forming. There were more B-24s now than there were B-17s flying. The B-24s were cruising at a faster speed than the B-17s and were leaving the B-17s behind us.

Dabbs and Cross had to go to the bomb bay and arm the bombs. At this lower altitude it would be easier to do. We were beginning to climb and would top off today at 26,000 feet, which would be 3,000 feet higher than on the first mission to Bremen. Twenty-six thousand feet was about as high as you could fly a B-24 and keep it in formation. But the higher we flew, the higher the flak came after us.

The sky was as clear as a bell, with not a cloud in sight.

The first flak came up as we passed over the Zuider Zee and into occupied land. The air was so clear that I could see the anti-aircraft gunshots flashing on the ground. In a few seconds, the shells would burst around us at our altitude. The gun positions at the Zuider Zee could really zero in on us from some reason. They were marksmen.

As soon as we were out of their range, the P-47s began showing up. Again, in groups of four, flying on both sides of us. They were everywhere you looked, all around us.

What a good feeling it was to have them with us.

I hoped we would never fly without them.

Those beautiful P-47s were sweeping the sky in front of us, back and forth across the formation. Then they were beginning to turn back. Soon the last group of our fighters left us and was gone.

Cook called out on the intercom, "Fighters, 10 o'clock, way out and low." I saw them about the same time. Cross dropped the ball turret. I fired my gun to be sure it would fire. Cross said, "My God! The sky is full of them!" I said, "Me 109s coming at us at 9 o'clock." I knew this was it. Three Me 109s passed under our ship

from 9 o'clock. Everyone was firing at them. Tyler said, "The P-47s are turning around and coming back at 4 o'clock."

I knew that the P-47s had stayed with us a long time and must not have very much fuel left in their tanks, but they were coming after the Me 109s. There were more Me 109s than there were P-47s. I watched an Me 109 get on the tail of a P-47 and the P-47 blew up with the Me 109 shooting at it. I could see several Me 109s being driven into the ground and exploding upon hitting the ground. The P-47s were on their tail all the way down and then would come up for more.

To our left and rear, at 7 o'clock, a group of B-24s were being attacked by FW 190s. The Germans were flying through our formation and two B-24s were going down in flames, with smoke pouring from their wings. At the same time, Dabbs said, "FW 190 hitting our formation at 6 o'clock." I could hear Cross and Dabbs firing. Dabbs came back with, "God Damn! One of our ships is going down!" Wright said, "Try to see where it goes and I will try to report it." Dabbs said, "The FW 190s are breaking away!" I came back with, "They're leaving the formation at 7 o'clock."

Wright said, "We are now reaching the IP." I looked to 11 o'clock and the sky was black with flak. We were at 26,000 feet but it wasn't making a bit of difference. The flak was there in front of us to fly into.

The flak burst puffs were everywhere, under us, over us, beside us. The cordite smell was sickening. Steel could be heard hitting the airplane. The bomb bays came open.

"Bombs away." Again the ship leaped up when it lost its heavy load. The bomb bay doors closed. As we were passing out of the flak clouds, I looked down and saw our incendiary bombs going off like match flashes over every inch of the city. It was just like match sticks hitting the ground everywhere. The city was in flames.

As the incendiary bombs left the bomb bays they were blowing back through the formation of trailing aircraft. Incendiary bombs passed over and under our left wing. One of the incendiary bombs stuck in our left wing man's right wing.

I was about to have a fit. I called out to Wright on the intercom, "Stay away from our left wing man. He has a live bomb in his wing. He's right in my nose!" I said. Wright tried to move over but the wing man shifted and stayed with us. I told Wright, "The bomb looks like it's just going to stay there and not start burning." I couldn't take my eyes off it. Several minutes after

getting out of the Bremen area, I was still trying to get used to seeing a live bomb in the guys wing next to me. I thought, "If he gets any closer to us, I'll be able to just reach out there and grab it. I wish he would get away from us." I could see the incendiary sticking through the aluminum skin of the wing about four feet from the end of his wing. Everything was getting quiet. Only the engines and a blowing wind could be heard. It was peaceful after all the noise of the flak bursting.

Then it came. Tyler, in the right waist position, called out, "Me 110s! Me 110s! Two Me 110s at 3 o'clock! Three o'clock!" I turned and looked over his shoulder. The two German fighters were coming straight for us. Tyler was shooting as hard as he could. Cross, in the ball turret, and Cook, in the top turret, both began firing. The two fighters kept coming, one behind and above the other. Straight into us.

The first Me 110 fired two balls of fire at us. Then the Me 110 above and behind him fired two balls of fire. The four balls of fire were coming straight for us. Right in my face. Tyler stopped shooting and put his arm over his face. I did the same thing. I looked back up for a last look and I could see the four trails of white smoke behind the rockets. The first two rockets went about three feet over the top of the ship, above my waist window. The next two looked like they had just slowed and fell off about fifty feet away and went under us. The two Me 110s went under us. I turned and started shooting at them. The Me 110s that went under me were so close that I could count the rivets on their wings. I could see my bullets hitting the airplane. I could see the pilot with his oxygen mask on, sitting in the cockpit. They were in slow motion as they went by. My mind had slowed the time down. The seconds were now minutes and hours.

Everything was happening so fast, except when the rockets were approaching and they had looked like they were coming in slow motion. I could recall every little detail. I had guessed that the last two rockets had just run out of propellant. The two that went over us passed between us and the first lead ship although less than twenty-five feet separated our two planes.

On the way to the North Sea, the flak patches became very heavy. We would see white and red puffs and the flak would stop. The Me 110s would then start to attack. They were coming in from 10 o'clock and 7 o'clock and passing through the formation.



USAF Photographic Collection

Our incendiaries fall through our bomber formations below us.



I started firing at the 10 o'clock attack and they passed over and under us. I couldn't count the number of ships. It was all happening so fast. All I could do was shoot.

When we reached the North Sea we were at 26,000 feet and the temperature was fifty-five degrees below zero. Ice was all over me. It was a great relief to get out over the ocean and away from Germany.

Tyler raised the ball turret and Cross opened the door. As Cross got out of the ball turret he raised the right side of his helmet above his ear - dangerous in this frigid air - and began to knock the ice from around his neck and oxygen mask. Cross left the right side of his helmet up for a few minutes, while working with his mask, trying to get the ice out of it so he could breathe. He put the hose in his mouth while working on his mask.

I had been breaking ice off the front of my mask all during the flight, and clearing it out of my hose.

As we began to drop into lower altitude, Cross said that his ear was burning. As we got lower, his right ear looked like it was covered with big water blisters. It looked as if he had been in a fire and got it burned. The ear began to pain him. He said he could hardly stand it. At 10,000 feet, I took my steel helmet off and lowered my oxygen mask. I felt a stinging sensation under my eyes on my cheeks. I looked at Tyler and he had a red "V" under each of his eyes on his cheeks. I knew then that our faces were frostbitten above the oxygen mask.

Cross' ear was getting worse. I told Wright that he had a bad frostbite and warming up at the lower altitude was hurting him. Wright said, "We will be at the field soon. Try to keep him comfortable." We were soon over the airfield. Van Bogelen fired a flare, telling the ground that we needed medical help when we got on the ground. Several of the aircraft fired flares. We were the sixth airplane to land. We taxied to the end of the runway and turned. The medics were waiting. They were taking wounded out of some of the first planes that came back.

As soon as the bomb bay doors opened, the medics were in the plane. They put Cross on a stretcher and took him to the hospital. Cross was now in real pain. As soon as the medics cleared the ship we taxied on to the hard stand and parked the ship.

We touched down at 1542 hours. It had been seven hours since he had taken off from the field.

We all unloaded the airplane and looked around the ship. There were 20 mm bullet holes in our tail, and a big flak hole in the

bomb bay door and several smaller holes beside the old patches in the fuselage. We all got in the truck and rode to debriefing. Everyone was too tired to talk while we rode.

We each told the debriefing officers what we had seen on the mission. We went to the locker room and then stopped at the mess hall and tried to eat. I walked to the hut. I was missing Cross and wondering how he was.

I sat down on the bunk and began to write some of the events that had taken place. At debriefing I had learned that out of the twenty-six ships that were sent out, only twenty-one made it to the target. Four came back with mechanical damage before getting there. One plane was missing. I knew one wasn't coming back. Dabbs and I saw it going down.

It was the group's first combat loss. This was the second mission I had completed and come back safe from. Ten men lost and I don't know how many other men hurt like Cross. God had brought me back safely again. It was so close. This second flight over Bremen made the first flight seem not so bad.

Medcalf's crew had come through the mission safely. Their plane had a few holes but no one was hurt.

We all lay down for a while, then got up and went to the hospital to see Cross. Three of Medcalf's crew went with us. Cross' whole head was in a huge bandage. He had been given a shot for pain. I could hardly believe that his ear had frozen in such a short time when he had his helmet flap up. He said, "They thought I'd be able to fly again in about five days."

Several of us walked back to the hut together, talking about Cross. I said, "Cross said he could fly in five days. That means Christmas."

When I arrived back at the hut, I filled the pot bellied stove with coal. To try to keep busy I sat down on my bunk and started to write to my wife. I knew that if I said too much about the mission, the Army censor would cut it out. I began to write some of it anyway. I wrote, "I finished my second mission." Then I stopped. I closed my eyes and thanked God for being with us today, for letting the four rockets miss us. I knew that something like that was only in God's hands. He was the only one who could have made the two rockets run out of fuel before they got to our ship. They came so close to us.

The next morning, the English worker showed up with our clean clothes. He came in the hut and woke us up. He had all my laundry separated from the others. Nice and pressed. It was good

to see some nice clean clothes for a change. I gave him several loose cigarettes that I had and paid him. He was happy as he could be and said that he would be back on Friday to pick up more. He asked, "Where's the bloke what slept in this here bed?" He was pointing at Cross' bunk. I said, "In the hospital. His ear was frostbit on the last mission." The worker shook his head. I paid him what Cross owed him and he put his clothes on his bunk. He said, "Sorry, Yank."

As usual, the weather changed for the worse. Rain was drumming on our tin roof. Ice was forming outside on the ground. The mail was slow. I had received no word from home. It would soon be Christmas and this would be the second Christmas that I had been away from home.

Tyler and I walked in the icy rain to the hospital to see Cross. He was doing better. This morning they had closed some of the skin on his ear and he would lose a little of the bottom lobe. Cross said he might get out in the next couple of days. There were a number of other airmen in the hospital. We stopped and talked to some of them. Several had been hurt on yesterday's mission to Bremen. Some were hit with pieces of flak and several had bullet wounds. Others got frostbite when their heated suits and shoes failed.

One soldier was really gone - completely "flak happy." He kept saying, "You can't make it. You can't make it." Then he would scream. "Flak! Flak! Flak!" They had him strapped down in his bed.

I told Tyler, "I don't want to come to this hospital again. It really does shake you up, seeing these airmen in this kind of condition."

The next three days were slow in passing. Each evening I was assigned a class to attend. Some of the schooling was on personal self-defense, some was on aircraft procedures.

Cross was still in the hospital on December 23. He still had bandages on his ear but he was feeling good.

Wright and Buckey came by the hut in the evening. They stayed around a while and then told us that we were on standby for a mission tomorrow. Wright said Cross would have to have more surgery on his ear, and that Dabbs was sick in the hospital. That was news to us. "Dabbs was here this morning," I said. We never knew where Dabbs was or what he was about to do.

Everyone had long faces. When Wright and Buckey left, Dewey and Earl, of the Medcalf's crew, and I started playing a game

of Black Jack. We had only played a couple of hands when Medcalf came in the hut and told them that they were on standby for a mission tomorrow. We continued to play cards until 2200 hours. I said, "If we fly tomorrow we will have two new replacements on the crew. The ball turret and the tail turret."

Christmas was two days away.

I hadn't been able to get a present to send to my wife. Maybe before the end of the year I could find something to send to her. Mail from home came in bunches about every two weeks, and it was about time to get some more mail. I was getting so many butterflies inside of me that it was hard to think of anything.

The night passed too fast. I could hear the Jeep going from hut to hut, starting and stopping, long before it got to our hut. The Jeep stopped in front and the sergeant came in. He woke both of the crews. He said both were on the list to fly. He seemed apologetic about having to wake us up to fly a mission.

I rolled out of my sack and looked at my watch. It was 6 a.m. How could we be going on a mission when it takes about four hours to get ready? I wondered. I asked Tyler, "What kind of a mission do you think this could be, starting out this late?"

Tyler said, as usual, "We'll find out soon enough."

It was so cold that I built a fire in the stove and put a helmet full of water on it to heat while I finished dressing. As soon as the water was warm, I poured part of it in Tyler's helmet and we both washed and shaved. I sure didn't want the oxygen mask freezing onto the beard on my face. The hut was just plain cold, even with the little heat from the stove.

Tyler, Cook, Van Bogelen and I walked to the mess hall. The path was puddles of muddy water and ice. It was a mess. I tried to eat some fruit cocktail and juice. They were a salvation at times like this.

We were soon dressing out for the mission in the locker room. We checked over each other to be sure we were not forgetting anything. I sure did miss Cross for he was always checking everything.

Tyler and I went on to the briefing room and sat down. It was about ten minutes before the crew showed up. Wright said he didn't know who our replacements would be today. They would assign someone after the briefing.

Here it was, the day before Christmas, with its Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men, and we are about to be briefed on dealing out Death and Destruction.

## Christmas Eve Mission with Jimmy Stewart

Briefing started on a solemn note. Something was said about it being Christmas Eve, 1943.

Christmas Eve had a very special meaning this year - it meant my third mission is about to start. After the formalities, the officer pulled the curtain back from the wall chart. "Would you look," I said to Tyler. The red line just went to the French coast and back. "This is my kind of mission."

Jimmy Stewart rose. "Fellas," he said, "this mission is uh - a very, very, important mission. We have to hit our target today. We have to plaster it. The Germans have some kind of - uh - it's a new rocket machine they've cooked up. They are going to use it to hit London and a lot of other cities over here in England. We have to stop it before they go that far."

He turned to the chart and picked up a long wooden pointer.

"We are going to fly in at 12,000 feet and hit these targets. Yea. I said 12,000 feet. I - uh - I know, fellas, that 12,000 is pretty low for us heavies. But - we just have to make sure we hit those targets today."

Stewart paused a minute and said, "Fellas, I'm going to make this voluntary. That means, anyone who doesn't want to go on a Christmas Eve mission does not have to go. You can just get up and walk out now. Nobody will hold it against you."

He looked around. "But - I'm going. Fellas, you can count on that. I intend to go along."

There was a long silence. No one left the room.

Stewart nodded. "Thanks, fellas."

Briefing officers said the weather would be good and we would have good fighter protection on this Christmas Eve. The target was Bonnières, France. We would be hitting the German's secret rocket emplacements there. Thirty-five aircraft from the group would go. "Flak will be heavy," he said, "but you will see the English coast most of the flight."

We were dismissed. The walk to the truck didn't seem as bad as before. Maybe it was because we were not to be over enemy territory very long.

Flying over the target at only 12,000 feet was the big worry now. "That's not very high," somebody said. "Remember what

happened, the last heavy bombers flew a low altitude mission?" someone said. "What's that?" I asked. "They were all shot down," was the reply.

We got out of the truck at the airplane. I put all my gear on board and began to check out the plane with Cook. Tyler said we had some time yet so we sat down under the wing. Wright was going over today's trip on the charts. A truck stopped and our two replacements arrived. They introduced themselves. I didn't really want to know their names. I just wanted to make sure they knew what to do. It was only their second mission. Most of their crews were wounded on their first mission and they were having to fly as replacements on other crews. I thought, "If we keep on, all of us will be flying as replacements."

The flare went up from the tower. The mission was on. We taxied out to the ramp taxi way and took our position in line. Jimmy Stewart's plane led off down the runway. We were to be the tenth airplane to take off, as lead plane in the second box of bombers. Down the runway we went and lifted off. We left the ground at 1108 hours. The mission had started at 1100 hours. Just as we were lifting off, other bombers were taking off at a field near us, crossing our flight path.

Just as we cleared the tree level, with Wright staying low, two B-24s from the other field hit each other, right in our path of flight.

There was a tremendous explosion. Debris filled the air. Part of it hit our aircraft. The concussion pushed us up. We passed through debris and smoke. I could see smoking pieces falling to the ground. I thought, "Twenty men were gone in a smoky flash." Wright had given our aircraft emergency power, trying to get out of the way of the debris. Seeing two B-24s hit so close to us was bringing tears to my eyes and a lump in my throat. I thanked God for allowing us to miss them as we lifted off the runway.

Wright was very unnerved by it.

Buckey took over. He took the ship up and formed in the formation.

I could see that one of the problems today would be that too many planes were trying to form at too low an altitude. There was not enough sky.

We were all finally in position and heading out over the English Channel. I checked and fired my gun. We were carrying 6,000 pounds of 500-pound general purpose bombs. The replacement ball turret gunner said that he couldn't pull the arming

wires. I went into the bomb bay and armed the bombs and got back to my position and confirmed that the bombs were armed just as we were about to enter France. As we crossed the French coast I could see the English coastline behind us. We were now reaching our IP and heading for the target area. P-47s and Spitfires were everywhere. Our altitude was 12,000 feet and the temperature was twenty below zero.

I kept waiting for the flak to start. I knew that at this altitude there would be plenty. Lieutenant Wittman was using the bomb sight and we would be dropping on a specific target. As we approached the target area, Wright gave Wittman control of the airplane. The bomb bay doors went open and in a few minutes the airplane jumped up. Wittman said, "Bombs away." Visibility was good. I watched the bombs hit the ground. We hit in and near the target. The French ground had so many bomb craters that it looked like there was no room for any more. This coast had been hit so many times.

We soon crossed the French coastline and flew back out over the channel. I had not seen one burst of flak. "Where were the gunners, down there?" I wondered. "At home on Christmas Eve?"

There were so many Allied fighters and bombers in the sky there was no room for the enemy. B-24s and B-17s were everywhere. P-47s and Spitfires filled what was left of the sky.

This was what I called a perfect mission. We were soon back at the airfield and sitting down on the runway. Sitting and standing by my gun, waiting for something to start, had been the only bad part of the mission. If the two ships had not collided in front of us on takeoff, this could have been called a milk run. We were all so quiet, that I almost felt I was up there alone.

Wright soon had the aircraft on the hard stand and we were unloading. The airplane was in good shape. I told the crew chief, "You will not have to patch her today."

The truck picked us up and we went to the briefing building. The debriefing went well and it was short. We learned that all the aircraft that were sent out went over their targets and returned safely. All thirty-five aircraft. No mechanical problems. Everyone was saying that they had hit their targets. "This must be some kind of a record," I thought. This being Christmas Eve, the Germans just didn't think we would make a raid that near to the holiday. Maybe they didn't think we would be there that late.

Maybe God was just flying with us.

I now had three missions under my belt. Three down and twenty-two to go. As soon as we were dismissed from debriefing we went to the locker room and got out of our flight gear, and then to the mess hall. For the first time in a long time, I felt like eating.

We all walked down the mud path, talking about the mission. When we got back to the hut, Medcalf's crew was there and had made it back safely. For the first time we were talking and joking about the day's mission. Dabbs was back in the hut from sick bay and was wanting to know all about the Christmas Eve mission. When we told him, he wouldn't believe us until we were all talking about it.

Tyler and I walked to the hospital to tell Cross about the mission. At the hospital, Cross told us that they had patched up his ear and done a pretty good job of it. They had taken a small piece of skin from his body and put it on his ear. Cross was in good spirits. He said he would be back with us "before the end of the year."

We talked to some of the other soldiers who weren't doing as well as Cross. It was depressing to see them. Some were really down and nothing that you could say would help them. I was just hoping that I would never be in their place.

## Making Christmas Candy on Hut Stove

On the way back from the hospital, Tyler and I were trying to think of something to do this Christmas Eve night. We went by the mess hall and got as much sugar as we could carry in our pockets and took it to the hut.

At the hut we put the sugar in our steel helmets and then added the chocolate rations that we had been saving. Then with some water added, we put the helmet on the pot bellied stove and started cooking it. We had two full helmets of chocolate that we hoped we could cook down and make a lot of candy. The ration bars were about one inch by six inches and plenty strong.

I really cooked it down so I knew that it would get hard. We spread some writing paper on the floor and poured the cooked down chocolate on it. It got hard pretty quick. We had more than enough for everyone in the hut.

Earl and Dewey made a Christmas tree out of sticks and coal. We all put paper and toilet paper on it to decorate it. "Damn if it don't look like a Christmas tree," Dabbs said. We turned Cross'

radio on and Axis Sally was playing Christmas music for us. She would interrupt the music once in a while and tell us about today's mission on the French coast.

There were eleven of us in the hut and we started two card games, one poker and one Black Jack game. We ate chocolate candy, drank water, sang along with the music provided by Axis Sally, and played cards until well after midnight.

When we did finally get in our sacks and turn the lights out, my thoughts went out to Elizabeth and home and what might be going on at home tonight. I thought of all the Happy Christmases that I had had and how happy they were.

It was eight o'clock - Christmas morning!

I lay on the cot in the damp hut, thinking of all the Christmases at home when I hopped out of bed and ran to stand in front of the Christmas tree, just as early as possible. I couldn't wait.

I forced myself to get out of this sack. I wondered if there really was Santa Claus anywhere. I got up and looked over at Cross' empty bed. "Who will be next to go in the hospital?" I wondered. I looked over at our little Christmas tree decorated with toilet paper. It just doesn't look like it did last night. I thought it was kind of pretty when we were playing cards and sitting around eating our hut-made candy.

When I got back from the latrine, Tyler and I walked to the mess hall, not saying a word to each other. I think we were both feeling sorry for ourselves, this being Christmas morning. At the mess hall there was a notice on the board that said we would get a real home cooked meal at mid-day in the mess hall. There would be turkey and all the trimmings, even pumpkin pie.

As we ate a little breakfast, the thought of turkey dinner began to brighten our day. When I finished breakfast, I walked over to the hospital to see Cross. He looked good and acted glad to see me. He told me they were going to let him come back to the hut on Monday, two days later.

There was a big decorated Christmas tree in the middle of the mess hall, which made it feel a little like Christmas. After a good turkey dinner with all our flight crews, the rest of Christmas Day was slow in passing.

Sitting by the pot bellied stove in the hut, writing to Elizabeth and reading her letters again, I thought this day had turned out better than last Christmas in Keesler, Mississippi, with me sitting in the mess hall kitchen floor in water.

On Monday, Cross walked into the hut early that morning, back from the hospital. Seeing him standing there was like seeing a long lost brother. I said, "Cross, we are going to get a two-day pass to go to town today, and you are back just in time to go." Cross didn't want to try to go. The medicine that he was taking was making him feel bad.

I then decided that I would try town on my own. I got dressed, took a bar of soap, some cigarettes, a bar of chocolate, a pair of nylon women's hose, found a piece of paper to put around them, and went by the mess hall. I got a sack in the mess hall and poured about five pounds of sugar in the sack. Then I walked to the railway station in Tivetshall.

The train to Norwich finally arrived. It was only a short ride to Norwich. The train was packed with both English civilians and American GIs. Most of the English civilians were older people. I was thinking that I would visit the English Home Guard major and his family that I had met the last time I was in Norwich. I knew that they would not have much of the items I had put together. They were all in short supply and rationed.

When I arrived at the train station in Norwich, I asked around until I found a conductor who knew which direction I should take to find Fourteen, Mile End Road, Eaton, Norwich. The conductor pointed and said, "That way, Yank." I took off walking, hoping he knew what he was talking about.

I walked about a hour. The sack of sugar was getting heavy to carry. I stopped and asked several Englishmen and each time it was, "That way." I was about to give it up as a bad deal, when I saw a sign saying Mile End Road. I kept looking for house number 14. There it was. The name on the post was Major E. W. Lale.

The house was a typical English town house, with a little front yard. Very nice looking. As I stood there looking up at the door I felt kind of uneasy, calling on the family. I told myself, You have come this far so here goes.

I walked to the door and knocked. The major's wife came to the door and she recognized me from the meeting in the theater. She asked me to come in. Major Lale was in the room and he began to talk to me. I gave Mrs. Lale the things that I had brought. She was so pleased with them. She gave the cigarettes to her husband.

Mr Lale talked about the city of Norwich, and what had happened to it in the past few years.

Mr Lale's daughter came into the room and shook hands with me. "I'm sorry I have to leave," she said.



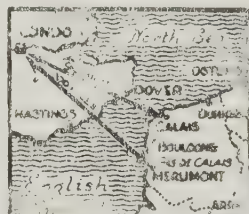
Norwich jewelry for my angel.

## Calais Raiders Told: Smash Secret Targets at Any Cost

**M**ORE than 2,000 Allied airplanes were used on Christmas Eve in a series of daylight operations against "special military installations" in the Calais coastal area of Northern France — believed to be the location of the German "secret weapon" concentration.

These attacks carried the non-stop air offensive from bases in Britain to a new high peak of intensity, and the fifth day of the monster blitz established two new records for the American Eighth Air Force.

It employed the largest force it had ever sent out, and the force of heavy bombers which attacked the chief target was the largest ever used on such an operation. In addition, the "secret weapon" operations, which covered almost all the day, in one hour, was carried through without



Headlines blare story that our censors forbids us to tell.

"There is a meeting I must attend." Her mother gave her the nylon hose and she ran and put them on. She returned and said that they were beautiful, showing me her legs. She thanked me for them and then left.

It was nice to talk to an English family and get to know a little about them and the city.

Mr. Lale introduced me to his son, a young man about 10 years old. He liked sail boats and airplanes. He knew the sound of every type of aircraft, and knew what each one looked like. The young man could identify each immediately. He was a pleasure to talk to. I almost forgot that I was talking to a child.

Mr Lale showed me the local morning paper. It was the first English paper that I had seen. On the front page were headlines about the Christmas Eve air raid to the French coast. The headlines read, Calais Raiders Told, Smash Secret Targets At Any Cost. I couldn't believe how accurate the article was about the raid. Here I was reading headlines about something that I had been a part of. The whole paper was about the raid to the Calais coast.

The front page had big headlines. 2000 Planes Raid Rocket Gun Coast. Eighth Air Force Sets New Records. Hits Germany's Secret Weapons. Everything was about the raid. I asked Mr. Lale if he had papers that were published around the date of December 16 or 20. He found December 17. It was describing the raid of December 16 into northwest Germany. It said Forts in Flak Battle. (This was the December 16 raid on Bremen.) "Smoke seen fifty miles off, coming up through the cloud cover."

It was a very accurate description of the raid.

It was hard for me to believe that everything that I was doing was in headlines in papers all over the world. I asked Mr. Lale if I could have the news articles, and he cut them out for me.

Major Lale asked if I would stay for dinner, and then insisted that I do. His wife prepared a very nice table and dinner. Fish and potatoes and a soup served with black bread.

I knew that food was in short supply. I tried to be polite and not eat very much. During dinner, Major Lale talked about his part in the evacuation of the English forces from Dunkirk. He was a sailboat enthusiast and owned a large sailboat that he had used during the evacuation.

After a nice family day, he asked if I would spend the night. I politely excused myself and said that I had to get back to the base that night.

When I left, I was feeling good about spending a day with a real English family, and seeing how they lived and what they thought about. It had been a pleasure to be welcomed into their home.

It was a good long walk back to downtown Norwich. I walked on to the train station to find when I could get back to the base. It was going to be several hours before I would be able to return on the train. I walked out of the station and started looking in the little shops.

I saw a little shop with some jewelry and old guns. I went in. The storekeeper showed me several pieces of jewelry that were too expensive for me to buy. There were several beautiful sets of dueling pistols that were very old. I wanted a set but I knew that I couldn't buy Elizabeth a present and the guns too.

I kept looking at the jewelry. The shopkeeper showed me a little gold bracelet with several old cut stones that looked like diamonds. The stones were set in a black gold setting. The shopkeeper said it was a very old piece of jewelry, and wasn't sure where it originated. He wasn't sure that they were real diamonds or rose diamonds. He would sell it to me for twenty pounds (about eighty dollars). I tried to give him ten pounds but he wouldn't take it. I then picked out a pretty old gold lapel watch. It had a cover and was all engraved. I told the shop keeper that I would give him five pounds for the watch, and ten pounds for the bracelet. He said, "Fifteen pounds for both?" "Yes," I said. I turned to walk out. He called, "All right, Yank! You can have them both for fifteen pounds." I gave him the money, picked up the jewelry, and got out before he changed his mind.

I was delighted to get them. I thought they were beautiful and would make a nice, but late Christmas present for Elizabeth. Now, I only had to find some way to get them to her.

On my way back to the train station, I passed a row of town houses near a small river or canal. On one of the town houses was a sign that said, Rooms to let for the night, four shillings. I went up to the door. A big fat lady came to the door. She showed me a nice room with a big bed. I told her that I would take it for the night, and paid her. The fat lady stood around for a while and watched me. Then she showed me where the bathroom was, across the hall. I went to the bathroom, washed, and combed my hair. When I came out, the fat lady was still standing there. She whispered to me, "Would you like to have a lady friend for the night? It will not cost very much."

The fat lady had caught me by surprise. Maybe I was just embarrassed. I said, "I would not be interested. I would like a good night's sleep in a good soft bed." "She said, "Right Yank." She pulled the door closed.

I was beginning to wonder what kind of place I was in. During the night, I heard other GIs coming in and going to their rooms. Once in a while, I could hear a woman's voice. Most of the night went very quietly, and I must have slept very good in the soft bed.

The next morning, I cleaned up a little. Then I left without seeing anyone. I bought some fish and chips down the street, and ate them as I walked along. I stopped and bought a small English flashlight or, as they say, "torch." If you walked the streets after dark, you had to have a torch to keep from falling over somebody standing around. Everything was dark when the sun went down.

I stopped in a postal shop in the railroad station and tried to get the watch and bracelet mailed to Elizabeth. The postal storekeeper wouldn't help me. He said, "Yanks have to mail their mail on their base." The damned Limey seemed mad at the world and he hated all Yanks.

A friendly Limey told me to go by the bank, that they might be able to help me. I found a bank and went in. An elderly man met me and asked what I needed. I showed him the presents that I had bought for my wife. He said he could help me. He put them in a little box and said it would cost several shillings for the bank to send it. I said that was fine. Military mail was free at the base but I wasn't sure they would send it. I just wanted it to get to Elizabeth. I paid him and he gave me a receipt which I didn't expect. I then felt that it would get to her. I asked if I could also send some money to my wife. I had won quite a bit while playing Black Jack and needed to get rid of it. He filled out some papers and I gave him sixty pounds to send. He said, "It will take two weeks but your wife will get it."

Walking out of the bank, I was wondering if Elizabeth would ever receive the 240 dollars, or the jewelry. The receipts the man gave looked legal enough.

Walking down the street I looked up at the large Norwich cathedral that looked like a big medieval castle. It made me feel like I was in a strange place. I began to look for some place that I would feel a little secure with. I found the Salvation Army and had a soft drink and some "crumpets" or, as I called them, cookies. I met several air crew GIs and we sat at a little table and talked for a while.

All of them were like me, trying to keep back the tired and homesick feeling.

It was getting late and dark. We all walked back to the train station together, acting like we were having a good time. I stood around in the train station for about an hour, watching the English people and GIs coming and going. The train to Tivetshall finally rolled out of the Norwich station. The station there would be the first stop.

I felt that I had accomplished things on this trip. I had dinner with an English family. Spent the night in an English town house, or maybe it was a house of prostitution. Bought and mailed my angel her Christmas present. Found my way around in a strange town. Learned a little something about the English people.

The train soon stopped in Tivetshall. I walked straight to the mess hall. It was still open. The place looked good. After I ate, I walked along the muddy path back to the hut.

I opened the door to the hut. My God! It smelled like gasoline. I couldn't imagine what in the world was going on.

There was Cook, at the other end of the hut, cleaning an old motorcycle. He said he had bought the motorcycle from one of the ground personnel.

I had heard that an American soldier could not own or have a vehicle of any type other than a bicycle. Cook said, "I don't care. I now own one and I am going to use it to go back and forth to the airplane, instead of walking every time." I thought that was a good idea. The ground personnel all had bicycles and it was a long way to the airplane to walk.

The hut smelled like gasoline all night. Cook laid the motorcycle on its side and tried to put it under his bunk at the end of the hut, with a blanket over it. I don't know what kept the hut from blowing up with all the gasoline fumes in it.

I still had not received mail from home. There were a few letters and packages arriving for the ground personnel on the base. I guess it was because they had been over here longer.

The next morning, Cook rode his motorcycle to the mess hall and I rode on the back of it with him. After mess we rode together to the airplane. We filled the motorcycle with aviation fuel from the airplane. I told Cook, "You had better not get caught doing this." He said, "Robbie, no one cares. Anyway, I have several bottles of lighter fluid that I bought in town. I carry them in the motorcycle bag. I'll tell everyone I'm using lighter fluid to run the

motorcycle on." I thought, "What a story. Maybe someone will believe him."

We rode all around the base and by the officers quarters. We stopped and talked to Wright and Buckey. We found them in their bunks. That is where they stayed most of the time, just like we did. Their hut wasn't as nice as ours and they didn't have a big pot bellied stove, or lights like we did. In fact, our hut was all fixed up with the comforts of home. We were always trying to improve it.

Wright wanted to hear all about the motorcycle. Cook told him how he had come by it. Cook said he had won most of it in a card game with the ground crew, adding only a few pounds of his own. This wasn't the story that he had told me. Wright said, "Be careful on that thing. I don't think you should take it off the base."

Wright said he had just been told that we might be put on standby alert for a mission tomorrow, if the weather stayed like it was. "I'll let you know some time before dark," he said.

I thought, "Just in time to ruin a good night's sleep."

This took the air out of both of us. Things had been going pretty good. We were about to forget what we were there for. We didn't have much more to say and rode on back to our hut.

When we arrived back at the hut we told the rest of the crew what Wright had said.

Dabbs said, "I'm not feeling so good. I think I may have to go on sick call tomorrow." Dabbs did have a bad cold. He had missed the last mission because of it.

I kept it to myself but I was beginning to wonder about Dabbs.

Dabbs walked out of the hut.

Wright showed up at the hut some time later. Wright said we were on alert for the mission tomorrow. He said we would have a replacement tail gunner. "Dabbs said he won't be able to go."

No one said very much and went back and sat on their bunk, trying to look busy doing something.

It was almost impossible to go to sleep, thinking about the mission tomorrow. Wondering where it would go. I got up and fed coal to the pot bellied stove several times during the night. This damned stove seemed to be the only comfort there was in my life .

I must have fallen asleep for the Jeep woke me, stopping and starting at the huts, and driving up to ours. It was 4:30 a.m. The sergeant came in and shook each of us on both crews, Medcalf's and Wright's.

We had to be in the briefing room at 0600 hours. I got out of the sack and stood by the stove. It was still putting out heat for I had fed it most of the night. I had shaved, late in the night, so it didn't take long to get dressed. Cross and I were the first out and on our way to the mess hall. Cross still had a bandage on his ear. "I'm going to keep my flight helmet on so no one will notice it," he said. "I'm going to fly. No one is stopping me because of my ear. I can fly. It's okay."

Once again, we went down the damned mud path to the mess hall. The fruit cocktail was still the salvation of my stomach for breakfast before a mission. I don't think anything else would have stayed there. It seemed to settle the butterflies.

We went on to the locker room and dressed out for the flight. I was glad to have Cross back so we could check each other and be sure that we had everything we needed.

We were standing around, waiting for some of the other crew members to finish dressing. Cross said, "When we get back, if we get back, let's get together and see if we can finish that latrine and showers beside our hut. The damned Limeys have been working on it for over a month now, and we still have cold water and cold everything." I said, "Okay. Maybe we can borrow enough stuff some night to build the thing. I know where there is some stuff to work with." I was wondering what brought up the subject. I guess anything would help Cross get his mind off of the coming mission.

We got to briefing, carrying all our flight gear, and set our flight bags down outside. We went in and sat down. A lot of crews had already arrived.

We saved a seat for Wright for we knew he would be late, as usual. And we knew it would bug Jimmy Stewart. For some reason, Wright was late at every briefing.

Everyone got there but Dabbs.

Wright came in at the last minute, just as the briefing officers walked up to the front of the room and someone said, "Attention."

Jimmy Stewart, with a puzzled look on his face, watched Wright come in.

The curtain was pulled from the wall chart. The mission target for the day was Mannheim, just across the river from Ludwigshafen.

## Murderous Flight to Mannheim

The red tape zig-zagged over Europe as if we were taking off on a sightseeing tour. I thought, "What a trip this was going to be." The briefing officers gave us every detail: weather, escape routes, heavy flak areas, numbers of known guns over and near the target, fighter protection, enemy aircraft expected, bomb load, fuel load, number of planes going. They didn't leave anything out.

An officer dismissed us with, "See Europe and return safely." I walked out the door of the briefing room alongside the chaplain and medical officer. You could only hear the shuffle of feet and chairs in the room. No one was saying a thing as we were leaving.

Outside, I picked up my flight bag and walked to the waiting truck, not really knowing if my feet were moving. I was beginning to move like a Zombie. I kept trying to think, "This mission is my fourth. There are only twenty-one more to go after I make this one. Then I can go home. Go home. There will come an end to this, some day. I have made it through three. I will make it through all twenty-five."

I kept telling myself these things and asking God about it. Trying to convince myself.

"God has let me get this far. He will help me make it."

My thoughts of Him were making it a little easier.

Someone said, "All out."

"The truck got out here to the airplane real quick," I thought. I guess I didn't know where I was with all the deep thinking.

Cook and I checked everything on the ship. Cook signed for the aircraft from the ground crew chief. A Jeep stopped by the ship and our replacement gunner got out and walked over to the ship. He introduced himself. He said part of his crew was in the hospital and he had to fly replacements. He was a tail turret gunner.

This would be his second mission.

The airplane had been loaded with 4,000 pounds of 100-pound incendiary bombs. Everyone got into their flight positions. I checked my ammunition. Made sure that I had half of a flak suit thrown over an empty ammunition box to sit on by my gun position. Plugged in my intercom, oxygen mask and heated suit. I tried to keep an eye on Cross. I didn't want him to hurt his ear again.

The tail gunner replacement was acting scared and unsure of himself. He looked so innocent still. Inside, he wasn't any more scared than I was. I was trying to keep from showing it.

Everyone confirmed that they were ready. The putt-putt auxiliary generator and hydraulic pump made a noise but they were drowned out when Wright started the big engines.

Wright was going over the flight check list with the intercom open when the flare went up from the tower. Buckey said, "The mission is on."

Wright taxied out to the ramp and got in line for takeoff. We were to be the fourth to take off. Group was sending up twenty-six planes today. I thought Group was doing pretty good to get that many B-24s in the air on one mission. The weather was good. A few very high cumulus clouds. Clear as a bell at ground level.

Down the runway and lift off. Everything was perfect today. Wright headed for the formation to get in position. We helped each other to get into our flak suits. I checked out my oxygen mask and heated suit, gloves and shoes. We were now in position in the formation: second flight lead, tucked under the rear of the lead aircraft with two wing men that were flying with their wing tips just behind our wing tips. "They sure are trying to get friendly with us," I thought. I would have liked a little more distance between us but I felt comfortable to have them beside us.

As we passed over the channel, each position fired its guns and made sure there was a live bullet in the chamber of the guns. I sure wanted a gun that would fire at high altitude and not be frozen.

We are now crossing the French coast line. Flak started coming up some distance away from the formation on both sides of us. The fighter escort was showing up, all around the formation. Spitfires below us, P-47s to our sides and above. Always in groups of four fighters flying together.

I was getting the feeling that when our fighters flew their range and turned back, Germans fighters would show up to hit us before the next group of our fighters arrived to protect us.

The trip today was going to be over too much of France and Germany. We were going in on the French coast, then up north of Paris, a long way east of Mannheim, then swing back across Mannheim and Ludwigshafen, come back across the Zuider Zee into the North sea and back to England. Mannheim was in the middle of southern Germany. We are going to fly through the most heavily defended areas of Germany. Who ever picked this route really wanted us to see Europe.

I was right. Just after our fighter protection was leaving, German fighters approached from 11 and 12 o'clock. The group at 12 o'clock was coming straight for our us. The FW 190s flew right through us, just over our wings. They passed through so fast we hardly got to shoot at them. The Germans regrouped to the rear and came back from the 7 o'clock angle. From there I was getting to shoot almost continually, trying to keep it in short bursts to keep from burning up my gun. It was really hard to keep my finger off the trigger with the FW 109s coming in like they were. Everyone was firing, except Tyler in the left waist. He had to wait for them to cross under or over us.

A single FW 190 must have decided that he was going to take us out of the formation. Wright had Bullet Serenade positioned a bit low and behind the first flight. Our left wing man was above and back of us and was trying to close up the formation.

The lone German fighter just seemed to be sitting at 7 o'clock, going the same speed as we were. His 20 mm bullets were passing over and through our ship's left tail. Our tail turret gunner was exchanging continuous fire with him. As he was drifting around to 8 o'clock I was able to sight and fire at him in front of our left tail. The FW 190 was too high for the ball turret. Cross was having a fit over the intercom about it.

The FW 190 came still closer at 7 o'clock and was beginning to break up. I was firing and the replacement tail turret gunner had both turret guns blasting away. The tail gunner called out on the intercom, "I got him! I got him! Did you see it? I got him! He's going down!" I thought, "Well, he had the first shots at him and was exchanging fire with him first." The FW 190 had started breaking up when I was exchanging fire with him at 8 o'clock low under the left tail. I really thought that I had hit him for I could see my shells going into him.

Nevertheless, I confirmed that the new tail gunner had destroyed the FW 190. Though I had mixed feelings about it. I wasn't sure that I even wanted to say that I had shot down an airplane. The tail gunner was still talking about hitting the FW 190 when the fighters were coming around for another rear attack. They were now dividing in little groups and coming from under us from the rear about 5 o'clock.

Tyler said, "P-47s coming in from 4 o'clock!"

The German fighters began to leave at 9 o'clock low. Our P-47s were going after them. The Germans were going in every direction at a low altitude.

"Thank God, for those P-47s," I said, "What a beautiful sight to see."

We were now reaching our Initial Point on the bomb run. Everyone was quiet, after all the fighter excitement. The bomb bay doors came open. Wind was blowing through the waist like a storm. Flak was beginning to burst everywhere. Black smoke and the smell of cordite was blowing through the waist of the airplane.

Our target was southwest of Mannheim. The 4,000 pounds of incendiary bombs were released. They fell like match sticks all over the city.

Fires were everywhere. The bomb bay doors closed. The gale of wind through the waist slowed down. Flak was still bursting just above our wing tips as we cut a trail through smoke and flak bursts.

It seemed forever before we were out of the flak. Then it was all quiet, even peaceful.

"FW 190s at 8 o'clock," called the tail gunner. "Coming in low." I was watching the German fighters and saw them begin breaking away. Tyler, said, "P-47s way out at 3 o'clock."

At 7 o'clock, five FW 190s were attacking a B-24. The German fighters lined up behind the B-24 and exchanged fire. The B-24s guns were all firing. The B-24's wing and number two engine started burning. The ship fell to its left and rolled over and over, going down. I tried to get its number but I couldn't make it out. I just saw our group's tail markings. Our P-47s were now flying under us and after the FW 190s. "A little late for that B-24," I thought.

I was calling the falling of the B-24 on the intercom. I started counting parachutes coming out. "One, two, three." I waited. No more were getting out. I watched the B-24 flip round and round and hit on the ground right in the center of a small village. The center of the village started burning. It was a surprised village.

The P-47s were now closing in on the tails of the FW 190s. I watched two FW 190s hit the ground. The P-47s were on a duck hunt, looking for more to shoot. They were now all around us. Four were low to the ground and must have seen the train when I did. It was coming down a track at 9 o'clock, or ninety degrees to our flight path.

The P-47s just seemed to lower their elevation without changing their flight path. The train engine was just in front of them. They started firing just before they passed over the engine, then continued on their way. Steam started coming out of the train

engine and then the engine blew up. The first several train cars were flying off the track. Looking out my waist window was like seeing it happening on a live picture show screen.

I sat on the empty ammunition box with half of a flak suit over the top of it.

I was holding my gun and watching the train blow up.

I suddenly felt there was something wrong with me.

I was getting dizzy and had a heavy feeling.

I felt my mask and oxygen hose. My chest and mask were covered with ice. The lower part of my mask was frozen to my flak suit. I began to beat the ice off of the mask, hose and chest of my flak suit, and heavy flight jacket. I switched the demand regulator to full oxygen but I couldn't get any oxygen.

I was almost in a panicky stage. I began to get sick. I pulled the oxygen mask off. I knew that I didn't know what I was doing.

I fell back against Tyler, the right waist gunner.

As I began to regain consciousness, I had the oxygen hose of the walk-around bottle stuck in my mouth.

Tyler saw what had happened to me and stuck the walk-around hose in my mouth.

As I got back to feeling okay, I began working on my mask again. It was full of ice. The hose from the regulator was full of ice. I disconnected everything and shook the ice out, beating the hose on the airplane to break up the ice. I finally got it all cleaned up. The hose supplying oxygen had filled with ice from my breath. My mask had been off my face for some time and I was beginning to worry about my face freezing. I put my heated glove hand on one side of my face and then the other. I could feel the warmth. I soon had my mask cleaned up and back on my face.

I noticed, when cleaning the mask, that there was a little plastic ferrule, less than an inch in diameter, connecting part of the oxygen mask to the hose. It had been filled solid with ice. I couldn't get the ice out of it by squeezing. When I got back, I would remove it some way.

The plastic ferrule in the hose connection had frozen before but never had completely cut off the flow of oxygen. The temperature of the air was twenty below zero. Full oxygen was required for more than four hours of the flight.

The Zuider Zee was coming up in front of our flight path. There was the same old flak area putting the flak right in our path. The same as when we were going to Bremen. The German flak

gunners who were stationed at the east end of the Zuider Zee really knew how to use their guns.

I thought, "If we can make it through these guns, we will have it made." Our fighter protection was everywhere you looked. They sure looked good, sweeping over, under and beside us. The P-47s would come in fours and put their bellies up to us, then slide almost up to the formation and level off.

If they approached us that close with their nose pointing at us we would have started shooting at them. We were told that the Germans had captured American fighters and could use them at times to get to us.

Flak burst close to the formation. It came in bursts of five. They had our elevation. If they moved their aim over a few feet, the explosions would be in the formation with us.

We were not long in getting through the area and out to the water. The North Sea was now in front of us and we are crossing the coast line. Out over open water, the formation started letting down. I began to come out of some of my flight gear. Removing the steel helmet, flak jacket, and opening up some of my heavy clothing. As soon as I could, I removed my oxygen mask and put my hands on my face. My face was only burning on my cheeks. The V on both cheeks were in the same old place, between the oxygen mask and the goggles. When I knew that my face was okay, I looked at my oxygen mask and felt like throwing it out the window.

I could only thank Tyler for giving me oxygen from the walk-around bottle. If he had not been so alert, knowing what was going on, I might not have made it. I felt so exhausted. The tail gunner replacement was asking me, over and over, on the intercom, "You will confirm my fighter? The FW 190 that I shot down?" I said, "Yes." Cross said he had seen it blow up and fall apart.

We flew across the field in formation, then peeled off, got into the landing pattern and soon were on the ground. Wright taxied to the hard stand. We secured the aircraft and turned it over to the ground crew chief. I walked around the airplane, looking it over. In the left vertical stabilizer there were two big flak holes. One was big enough to put your head in. There was a 20 mm hole in the horizontal stabilizer. I thought of how close that FW 190 was when he came apart. Firing all the time. I didn't know how there could be only one 20 mm hole in our plane, and thanked God that was all that hit us.

The truck came by and we were soon at debriefing. The debriefing officer asked all about the fighter that was claimed by our replacement gunner. Cross and I confirmed it. Other ships' crews had confirmed that fire from our ship knocked the fighter down. The tail gunner was told that he probably had a kill and he would hear later when it was evaluated.

From briefing we went back to the locker room and got out of the flight clothes. I took my oxygen mask back to the hut with me. I was going to do something about that plastic ferrule in the hose connection in some way.

All the crew walked to the mess hall together. We had very little to say to each other about the mission. We were just glad to be back safe.

Out of the twenty-three airplanes that Group had sent, only nineteen made it over the target. We lost one that the German fighters shot down with men bailing out. "Another ten men gone but maybe three were on the ground in Germany some where," I thought. "Only God knows now."

I now had four missions down with twenty-one to go. This trip to Mannheim was the longest trip yet. We had taken off at 8:15 a.m. and returned to the base at 4:30 p.m. As I walked back to the hut, I thanked God for another safe trip and that no one was hurt on our ship. It was just eight hours and thirty minutes of hell. That was all I could call it.

I only wanted to get back to the hut, and fall into my sack. I felt like I could sleep forever.

I was still asleep in the morning when the construction Limey came in the hut with our laundry, wanting his soap, money and cigarettes. Getting clean clothes was about the best thing that could happen. This day was getting off to a good start.

The damned hut was still smelling of gasoline. Cook was still keeping his motorcycle indoors. We all were complaining about the gas smell. I did like the part of being able to ride with Cook to the airplane. It was so darned far to walk.

Later in the day, Cook and I rode on the motorcycle out to see our Bullet Serenade. We arrived at the hard stand and talked to the ground crew chief. The old girl was ready to go again. The ground crew had already fixed the holes in the tail and even painted the patches. The crew chief and the ground crew had worked on the airplane all night long. It was amazing to me how much work they had done and how fast they were making repairs.

Cook and I straightened up the inside of the ship. We picked up a lot of spent .50 caliber shells. Some were down under the waist floor and were hard to get out. We tightened up all the straps on the emergency equipment and made sure it was all secure. Checked everything for leaks.

Cook and I got on the motorcycle and were riding back to the hut. We rode around the base and were near the mess hall when two military policemen in a Jeep stopped us. One of them asked, "Who does the motorcycle belong to and where did you get it?"

Cook told them, "I bought it from another soldier on the field."

The MP asked, "What do you use for fuel?" Cook said, "Cigarette lighter fluid." He reached for a bottle from his bag on the side of the motorcycle. He acted like he was going to open the gas cap on the motorcycle gas tank. Cook said, "Do you want to smell it?" The MP said, "No, I don't want to smell it. You can't have a vehicle. You will have to talk to the Provost Marshal's Office. You will have to see him within three days." He gave Cook a note to take to the Provost Marshal's Office. Cook put the note in his pocket and we rode on to the mess hall.

Cook couldn't wait so he took off for the Provost Marshal's Office.

Back in the hut that evening, I asked him how it came out. Cook said, "They gave me three days to get rid of it." They had told the previous owner of the motorcycle to get it off the base. Cook said, "I told them I would sell it to someone off the base."

Cook left with the motorcycle. It wasn't long before he came back, walking in the hut with some money in his hand. He was saying, "Well, it's someone else's problem now. I don't have a motorcycle any more."

I thought, "At least, the gasoline smell problem is gone. Maybe we can get the smell out of the hut one of these days."

Cross asked Cook, "Who did you sell it to?" Cook said, "The first GI that I saw."

Wright showed up at the hut late that evening and told us that we were on alert for a mission tomorrow. The weather was turning bad but he was assured that it was going to get better by tomorrow. I had thought I would get used to hearing this kind of news some day, but that sinking feeling returned.

## Happy New Year

New Year's Eve was a sleepless night, waiting for the Jeep bringing the unwanted wake up call. Sometimes you think, "Maybe the Jeep won't come, this time."

Late in the night, I was hearing the Jeep stop and start until he was in front of our hut and the sergeant was walking through the door at 4 a.m., waking us up.

He didn't say, "Happy New Year."

The routine was getting normal now. Get up, clean up, take a walk in the mud to the mess hall, flight locker room and dress out, go to briefing.

Everyone arrived on time. The curtain was pulled off the wall chart. There it was, the target for today. Kiel, Germany. I thought, "Well, this fifth mission is going to be one to talk about." The weather man said things would not be good on the way to the target. Over the target the weather would be clearing. Takeoff weather would be poor.

Out of briefing and into the airplanes. The truck headlight beams were bouncing around in the fog. I was wondering if the weather man had stuck his head outside before writing his report.

The fog was getting a little thinner as we got everything ready on the airplane. Up went the flare from the tower, forming a dull glow in the fog. We taxied out and got in line and soon were going down the runway and lifting off, hoping the runway was still there. As we gained altitude, the clouds and fog were in patches, with a few breaks. Wright was having a hard time dodging and staying away from other B-24s. There was just too much cloud and fog. There were too many airplanes trying to use the little clear space that existed. It was impossible to form a formation.

Someone finally had some sense. Wright received a recall on the radio. Mission scrubbed. Return to base. It was just as bad trying to land.

The runway would be visible one minute and then vanish back into the fog the next. We broke out of fog about a hundred feet above the ground. Somehow Wright had made our approach straight on with the runway. We touched down and taxied back to the hard stand and parked the airplane. We all felt let down, not making a mission after all the preparations and dressing up. That weather man sure didn't know what he was talking about at briefing today.

Again, on January 3 there was a replay of New Year's Day. Get up, dress out in flight gear, to briefing, target for the day again is Kiel, Germany, same kind of weather briefing. Ride out to the ship, wait for the flare, get in line, taxi to the runway and race down it in dense fog. This time we were able to find each other and form a formation.

The formation was heading out over the North Sea. In front of us was a solid cloud bank. It looked like it started at the water level and didn't have a top as far as you could see, well over 60,000 feet up. Wright was on the intercom saying, "I hope that we are not going to get in that weather front." A recall came in on the radio. "Mission scrubbed. Return to base."

This back to base business was now getting to me. The tension of starting out on a mission, followed by the let down of not making a mission. It was like being on some kind of high and then they drop you.

Back in the hut we were talking noisily about the weather and about trying to make a mission. When we returned from a completed mission we were near total exhaustion, never talking much to each other. Up until now there was very little conversation between us and the other crew in the hut. The card games were becoming more frequent. Keeping the pot bellied stove warm, playing cards, listening to Axis Sally on the radio, writing letters, and trying to keep out of each other's hair. This was now becoming our biggest pastime. Letters from home had become nonexistent.

The next morning, our group sent out a mission to Kiel. Well! This was the mission that we had been trying to make. We were not called out to go on it. Maybe this will take care of the Kiel mission.

The 445th Group has lost six crews since we became operational twelve days before Christmas. That is sixty airmen missing in action in twenty-two days. We lost twelve airmen flying over from the States. Already seventy-two men gone out of our original group.

I tried to put the statistics out of my mind. It was too depressing. All I wanted to do now was survive.

Sitting on the end of my bunk, trying to keep the pot bellied stove warm, I picked up my oxygen mask to see if I could do anything with it, to get rid of the plastic ferrule that held the hose on the mask. The ferrule was the reason I couldn't squeeze the hose and break up the ice when it froze. I broke the plastic ferrule and took it out of the hose. I slipped the two pieces together. To hold

the hose and mask together, I found a needle and thread and stitched the two pieces together.

I could now squeeze the hose. If it had ice in it I could now break it and disconnect it from the regulator hose for a few seconds, shake the hose and drop out the ice, then plug it back in. It was worth a try.

Cross and Tyler liked the idea. Cross said he was going to do that to his mask if it worked on my next flight.

Just before dark, Wright came in and told us that we were on standby for a mission the next morning. "I'll see you at briefing if we are called."

It was news I would never get used to hearing. A sudden chill ran down my back. Maybe it was not fear but it was close to it.

Once again, the Jeep and the sergeant showed up early in the morning. I had just fallen asleep when I heard the Jeep. The sergeant still seemed apologetic when he called out and woke us up for the mission.

The routine starts again. Climb out from under all those blankets - there are ten of them now. Cross and I seem to have inherited the job of fire building. Dressing, shaving, washing out of the steel helmet. Walking the mud path to the mess hall and being sure not to eat anything greasy so that there would not be gas to form in our stomach at altitude. The fruit cocktail is still the best bet, and I sure hoped they never ran out of it. Dressing out in the flight room and then to briefing.

If we completed this mission, it would be my fifth. Everyone was on the ball, and in the briefing room before briefing started. Dabbs still had a few signs of his cold. Cross' ear was still bandaged.

The curtain was drawn away from the wall chart. There it was, the mission was still Kiel, Germany. The same place that I have been trying to go since New Year's Day. Group had hit it yesterday and lost another airplane and crew. I thought maybe they had forgotten to change the ribbon on the wall chart.

Jimmy Stewart got up and looked around the room. "Men, General Jimmy Doolittle has taken over the command of the Eight Army Air Force. He took the reins on December 29. What that means to us is that we can expect to begin flying a lot of deep penetration missions into Germany. Now and in the future."

"As if Kiel isn't deep enough," I thought. I wondered why Kiel was now so important.

The briefing officer got up. He said Kiel was a very large Navy base and had a large labor force. It was a key city in the defense of the Baltic Sea. He gave so many reasons that I couldn't remember them all.

It was to be completely destroyed.

After all briefing officers had finished with their part of the briefing, we were dismissed.

The walk from the briefing room to the trucks was the longest "short walk" in the world.

It was still foggy but the weather officer said we would have good weather over Europe. Our truck pulled up at the airplane. Bullet Serenade was still looking good, even with her patches. We were all glad to be back together again as a crew.

Everything checked out. Our bomb load was 5,000 pounds of incendiaries. Everyone loaded in and got ready to go. Up went the flare from the tower. The mission was on. The fog was lifting a little and you could see the end of the runway.

Wright taxied to the taxi ramp and got in line. There were twenty-six airplanes being sent out, with our plane flying left wing man on the lead aircraft. This let us take off in third position. Down the runway and lift off at 7:20 a.m. Visibility was about the length of the runway, and about 300 feet in elevation.

It took a very long time, getting through the ground fog and into clear sky.

There was the sun again. Wright quickly formed on the lead ship and the orange and black check ship. He closed in pretty close to the leader. He was getting pretty good at this stuff now, I thought.

We were soon over the North Sea and climbing to altitude. Dabbs and Cross pulled the arming wires on the bombs without an argument. I put on my flak suit and steel helmet. I was very interested in seeing how my oxygen mask was going to work today, after all the sewing and reworking that I had done to it. So far so good.

All I could see out the windows were B-24s. Way out to our right, there were several groups of B-17s that we were catching up with and would be passing soon. The sky was full of bombers as I looked back and to our left. Everyone test fired their guns. We were as ready now as we could be.

Wright said on the intercom, "The B-17s are going to be with us all the way. We will be making a 360 degree turn after we

break enemy territory so the B-17s will be over the target about the same time that we are."

The B-17s cruised at a slower speed than the B-24s and we were always passing them. This circling would take us over more enemy territory and expose us that much longer.

As we climbed to 23,000 feet altitude, I began to check my oxygen mask very closely. I squeezed the hose and felt little pieces of ice. I disconnected from the oxygen demand regulator and shook the ice out of the hose and plugged it back in on the regulator. Boy this hose is going to work great. The temperature was now thirty below zero.

I looked at Cross and pointed to my mask and said over the intercom, "It works okay." The flak started bursting near us. I knew without looking that we now were over the enemy coast. We were going in over the mouth of a large river with flak coming up from both sides of the river.

No one said anything for a while. I began to realize that something was missing. I said over the intercom, "Where is our fighter protection? I haven't seen any. Someone must have forgotten us."

Not a fighter in the sky. Just B-17s and B-24s. There were plenty of them.

My first thought was to blame it on Doolittle, the new commander of the Eighth Air Force. I hoped he didn't think this was some kind of Tokyo type raid.

I was looking out at 10 o'clock and suddenly Me 109s were everywhere at once. I started just picking out one near to me and firing in bursts, saying on the intercom, "Me 109s everywhere." Then came FW 190s. I couldn't count them. They were swarming in fast. Coming up from below were Me 210s. Hell! The Germans were having a field day with us. They were everywhere. Every gun position on the plane was firing at them.

Twenty mm shells were bursting all around us and the German fighters were flying right through our formation. We were reaching our Initial Point, the beginning of the bomb run, and the bomb bay doors came open. Flak was beginning to come up, white bursts and some red bursts and even green bursts. When the red bursts started, the German fighters broke away from us. The black bursts were now getting thick, thick, thick, bursting all around us. I heard the bombs leave the ship. The aircraft jumped up from losing its load.

The incendiaries were coming out of the airplanes like match sticks, and blowing back through our own trailing formations. I could see several of the incendiary bombs hitting B-24s behind us. A B-24 on our left and below us had an incendiary bomb stuck in its wing. This was the second mission that I had seen this happen. One B-24 near us was going down. An incendiary bomb had hit its fuel tank and it was burning.

The bomb bay doors closed. We were moving out from Kiel and the flak was getting lighter. I could see the complete city burning. Bomb bursts were everywhere on the ground. It was like little match flashes glowing everywhere.

As we flew away from the city, I noticed to our left at 8 o'clock a large formation of B-17s. They had just dropped their bombs and were coming out of the flak. The German Me 109s, FW 190s and Me 210s were hitting the B-17s with everything they had. I called on the intercom, "B-17s going down." I started counting planes. "One. Two. Three." Two just exploded. "Six." I was still counting. I could hardly believe it. I kept saying, "When they finish over there, they will be on us." Five more B-17s went down at about the same time. Two more blew up together. I had counted thirteen and knew I had missed some. This was the greatest destruction of aircraft that I had ever seen. "Where are our fighters?" was all that I could think. Everyone on the ship was calling out. "B-24 going down." "B-17 down." Four B-17s going down." "Fighters at 7 o'clock." "Fighters 6 o'clock."

Everywhere you looked, from 6 to 9 o'clock, there were air battles.

A death struggle was going on in the B-17 formation as we pulled away from them.

We were flying parallel with the Kiel Canal and leaving the slower B-17s behind us. In the canal, lined up, were four large German Navy vessels and a number of smaller vessels around them. The four larger vessels were firing up at us and their shells were bursting at our altitude, but to the left of us. You could see the ripples in the water from the vessels when they fired. You could actually follow the path of the shells to our altitude and watch them burst. The shells were bursting five in a row. With all the fire power the vessels were putting up, it wasn't a drop in the bucket compared to the fire power that was coming up from the city of Kiel. The smaller vessels in the canal were firing their smaller guns and their shells were dropping off at a very low altitude beneath us.

We were now passing out over the North Sea. At 9 o'clock low, over the water at about 1,000 feet, there was a lone B-24 flying toward land. Two Me 210s were on its tail. One Me 210 would line up on the B-24's tail and then the other, exchanging fire. You could see the tail turret gunner on the B-24 firing into the fighters, and the fighters firing into the bomber. The B-24 bomber didn't have a chance with the two Me 210 fighters. We wanted to help but all we could do at the altitude was to watch, and keep going. Everyone was wanting to help him some way, but it was impossible.

It was like seeing a picture show in front of you. The enemy coast line wasn't very far from the B-24 bomber. It looked to be about a mile away, at most. But there was just no chance of the bomber surviving. Two parachutes came out of the B-24 and in no time they were in the water. I was told that the North Sea was ten degrees, so the guys who bailed out didn't have much of a chance. The B-24 hit the water and exploded. The two Me 210s passed over the area, firing at the ocean and then headed back toward Germany.

The sinking feeling was awful. I sure wanted someone to help that lone bomber and the men in the water. I couldn't believe the Me 210s would shoot at two unarmed men in the water but I watched them make two passes over them shooting. I was having more feeling over that than seeing all the B-17s going down.

The English coast was coming in sight in front of us and it never looked better. We were soon over the airfield. As we flew by the tower in formation, several airplanes fired flares indicating there were wounded aboard. The ships with wounded landed first.

We touched the ground at 1427 hours, eight hours and fifteen minutes since we left. What an eight hours.

Wright taxied onto the hard stand and parked. No one on the crew was hurt. Only several 20 mm holes in the ship and no flak damage. Bullet Serenade had done it again. She had brought us safely home with God's help. I had lots of love for the old ship.

Waiting for the truck, we all were complaining noisily. Where were our fighters? What happened that they were not there to protect us? The truck arrived and took us to the debriefing building.

Each member of the crew had a long story to tell. We could hardly get through telling about what we had seen.

Wright said, "I've seen all that I ever wanted to see." Buckley and Wittman agreed.

This was the longest debriefing that we had been through. The debriefing officer had no idea what happened to our fighter

protection. He said if he found out, he would let us know. There simply had been no fighter protection on the entire mission.

What an eight hours.

After debriefing we went back to the flight locker room to change clothes. We were all talking about the lone B-24 being shot down by the two Me 210s and how the two pilots shot at the airmen who had parachuted into the water.

We walked to the mess hall and tried to eat. Then sloshed back through the mud to our hut. I fell on the bunk and went to sleep. The next thing I knew, a sergeant was waking me up and giving me some letters and a package from home. He had driven over in a Jeep and brought mail to everyone in the hut. This was like a gift from heaven. I got six letters, a can of cookies, and a box of candy, all from Elizabeth. She had mailed them before Christmas, and I was getting them January 5.

## A Christmas Message From My Angel

Elizabeth was all right and working every day. She had spent Christmas day with her family. She was alone Christmas Eve, thinking of me. She said how lonely it was, with us not being together. She wrote, "God in Heaven will bring us together again, I know." I kept reading her letters over and over. I could feel her presence near me. I opened the package from her. With the candy and cookies was a new picture of her.

I passed the cookies and candy around, and they didn't last very long. They were good while they lasted. We hadn't had that kind of goodies in a long time. We didn't realize how much they were missed.

Cross and I walked out to the latrine to get some water in our steel helmets. The weather was getting bad, foggy, wet and cold. The damned doors were still off of the latrine. Wind whistled through it. I said, "I don't believe these Limeys will ever get the place finished." Everything was damp and cold. We filled our helmets with water and went back to the hut. I took the eye off the stove and set my helmet of water in it to heat. I sat on the bunk reading over Elizabeth's letters until the water was hot. I washed up and shaved with the hot water. Then I sat down on the bunk and wrote to Elizabeth as much about the mission as I thought would get

through the censors. I filled in the mission events in my diary, then crawled back in between my ten blankets.

I thanked God for letting me live through the day, my fifth mission. This day had come to a good end. There had been mail from home and I was back safe back in my bunk under the blankets. Another day was about over. I fell into a deep sleep thinking about the lone B-24, and wondering why the two German fighter pilots didn't let him go. They knew that he was trying to get to land, and would crash land somewhere on the coast. I had heard of German fighters shooting at airmen in parachutes but this was the first time that I had ever watched it happen - and to men down in the ocean.

It was ten o'clock the next day before I woke. The others were still in their sacks. The day after a mission, heavy fatigue always seemed to set in. How could you be in hell one day and in safety the next?

I stuck my head out the door. The fog was thick with mist and drizzling rain. I couldn't even see the hut next to ours. It was just cold and damp everywhere. Moisture was running down the inside of our hut on the metal walls.

The next few days were spent trying to keep warm, and going out to the airplane to see that it was all right. The fog was so thick that you couldn't see fifty yards in front of you.

On January 7, some of our group's planes went out on a mission. The bombers were taking off in the fog. I sure was glad that we were not going. Cook, Cross and I walked to the tower at 8:30 a.m. to watch them take off. We could hardly see them leave the ground. Flares were being fired along the runway so they could see which way the runway was going.

Four days later we were called out for another mission. This would be my sixth mission if I completed it. Once again to the mess hall for the fruit cocktail, to the locker room to dress out, and back to the briefing room. The target for the day would be Brunswick, Germany. We were told that the weather would break before we reached the target. We would have fighter protection. The briefing officer went to great length spelling out the number of fighters that would be with us. The weather would be bad on takeoff.

I took the long, "short walk" out to the truck and we all rode to the airplane. We had been out to the airplane the day before and checked it out good. I loaded all my flight gear. The bomber had 5,000 pounds of 500-pound incendiary bombs aboard.

The tower kept us sitting at the hard stand. It looked like the mission was going to be scrubbed.

## Brunswick Shootout

We were unable to see the runway from the hard stand. We were beginning to hope that they would scrub the mission. At 9:20 a.m. the flare went up from the tower, making a dull glow in the fog. Wright taxied out and found a place to get in line on the taxi ramp.

We could only see about four ships ahead of us and behind in the fog. That was all the visibility. When we got to the runway, flares were being fired along each side, and at the end of it. As long as we stayed between the flares, and got up before we got to the flare in front of us, everything would be fine. Down the runway we rumbled, passing the men who were firing the flares, and lifted off. Up came the gears and soon the flaps. In a few minutes we were out of the fog but there was a lot of thin clouds in spots and at high altitude. The area in which we were to create our formation was patchy with clouds.

We finally formed up and headed out over the North Sea. As we crossed the water and broke the enemy coast at 20,000 feet, the clouds began to close in around us.

Wright was now having a hard time staying with his wing man. He kept calling on the intercom, "Give me the distance and position of the aircraft next to us." We were now trying to fly formation in the clouds, and there was supposed to be twenty-five aircraft out there with us in our group. I could see the airplane next to us about fifty feet away. He was staying close so he could see us. It was beginning to bug Wright.

I thought, "I hope everyone keeps flying at the same speed and keeps on going straight ahead." The cloud bank was getting thicker. Finally, I couldn't even find the airplane that was trying to stay close to us. Wright stayed on a straight and level course. We soon broke out in a clearing but we were all alone, with nothing and no airplanes around us. Soon I began to see several ships coming out of the clouds into the clearing behind us. One at a time they were breaking out of the cloud bank. It was as if each was on its own. "This is one hell of a mess," Wright said on the intercom. "Why don't they recall us?"

Soon an airplane flew up to our right wing and formed on us. At least, we were not alone. Then came some more and formed

with us. Some of the ships were not from our group and they had different tail markings.

Now another small formation pulled up with us. We were going to have several flights along with us on the way to the target. There were two groups out to our right, and one to the rear about five o'clock.

I told Wright on the intercom that the group at five o'clock was dropping their bombs, and asked if we were over the target. Wright said, "No. We are receiving a message to drop on a target of opportunity."

In front of us was a break in the lower cloud cover for a short distance. Wright lead our group toward the clearing area. There was a town down there. Alexander identified it as Mappen, Germany, not far from Brunswick. Wright opened our bomb bay doors and told Wittman, "Pick out the town and hit the damn thing." Wright started the bomb run. The other ships opened their bomb bays and were right with us. Wittman released our bombs, and in a few seconds the others aircraft were releasing theirs.

I watched the bombs fall and hit in the town. Fires were started everywhere. The bomb bay doors closed and we were now heading back home. We were in a good clear area with the clouds behind us.

Everyone was quiet and all you could hear was the engines, and the wind blowing through the waist.

Wright came on the intercom and said, "Do we have some kind of a electrical fire problem back there? I keep seeing little red flashes up here by my windshield." At the same time, little red pops or flashes were passing by my left waist window and over our left wing. Dabbs called out and began shooting. "Fighters! Two on our tail and shooting! Electrical problem, hell! We got a real problem." He said between bursts, "Hell! Three Me 109s at the tip of my guns. I keep shooting and they just keep sitting there!"

Cross dropped the ball turret and started firing. I couldn't even see the fighters. They were low and at six o'clock. I think they just wanted the lead ship for some reason.

Dabbs yelled on the intercom, "The damned 20 mms are bursting in my face.!" I could see the red puffs passing the end of my gun sticking out the left waist window. They were popping all across the top of our left wing. The fighters had been firing for at least three minutes. I thought, "They will have to pull away in a few minutes. Maybe I will get a shot at them as they do."

Cross and Dabbs were about to burn up their guns, shooting so much. Dabbs and Tyler called out, "P-47s! P-47s coming in!" Dabbs said, "Look, look at the P-47s on their tails." Eight P-47s came out of the clouds above us and came down under and were now on the tails of the fleeing Me 109s. Three of the four P-47s followed the Me 109s through a cloud. Two of the Me 109s broke out on the other side of the cloud with two P-47s still on their tails. I didn't know where the other P-47 and Me 109 had gone. We were now crossing out over the ocean, and the two P-47s were driving the two Me 109s into the water. Both of the Me 109s hit the water. The P-47s pulled up almost at the water level.

The two P-47s turned and came back toward the formation. In a few minutes another P-47 came out of the clouds and joined them. I thought maybe the other Me 109 got away in the clouds. This was another of those times when our fighter protection had saved us to fight another time.

We crossed into England and some of the airplanes with us pulled away from the formation, waving at us. They belonged at other home bases. We returned and landed back at our field at 1455 hours. Six hours and thirty minutes of air time.



USAF Photographic Collection  
Air Medal for our commander.

Back on the hard stand, I looked over the airplane for battle damage. With all the firing that had been going on, there was only one hole in the tail.

Again, only the power of God had kept the three fighters from shooting us down.

Back in debriefing, I learned that of the twenty-five aircraft that were sent out, twenty-one had dropped bombs somewhere. There was no losses.

Walking back to the hut, I kept saying, "Six down and nineteen more to go." As soon as I got to the hut, I got out my little black book and wrote a few notes about the mission. Then I wrote to Elizabeth. It was beginning to seem like a dream that I ever was at home with my angel. I sure needed her comfort, now more than ever. There was such a depression that seemed to be overcoming me, like never before. Dabbs was having a real problem about the enemy fighters that sat on our tail so long. He kept saying, "Those damned fighters were right in my face! In my face! I know I was hitting them but it wasn't doing anything to them. Just like I was shooting blanks at them. They just sat there and fired at us!"

Dabbs was so worked up over the mission that we had to stop him putting coal in the pot belly stove to keep him from burning the stove up. He was trying to take his frustrations out on something.

Soon, we all calmed down and fell asleep. As fatigued as we were, it was hard to get to sleep.

It was late the next morning before we came alive again. We all stayed around the hut and didn't get up to eat breakfast. Dabbs walked out of the hut and came back before noon. He said that he had seen Wright at headquarters. "Wright said we could have a three day pass if we wanted it," Dabbs said. "We won't be scheduled for a mission for a while." His recovery seemed remarkable. Cross said, "I bet we could make it to London and back in three days. What do you think?" "It's possible if we can make some train connections," I said.

Suddenly, things looked better.

## London's Loving Ladies

Cross and I said, "Why not try it?" We both got all dressed up in our best and only dress uniform. We put our shoulder holster

and .45 automatic under our coat. Put on our fifty mission crush hats, gave them a rakish tug and we were ready. We walked by the mail room to see if we had any mail from home. There wasn't any mail. Then by headquarters to pick up the passes. We walked on to the little station in Tivetshall.

We had to wait on the train for about an hour. I bought a paper and round trip tickets. While we were waiting, we read the paper. The headlines were all about our raids. I tore out some of the headlines and put them in my pocket. The train arrived on time. The trains in England seemed always to be on time.

The train was full of GIs and older English people. Time passed fast on the train and we were soon pulling into Liverpool station in London. As we stepped off the coach, we noticed that the station was a huge place. There were lots of trains, tracks, platforms, lots of people and soldiers of every description and nationality were getting on and off the train coaches.

Cross and I were like two country boys coming to town for the first time. We were looking at everything, including the young London girls walking down the platforms.

We walked out of the train station and took a cab to Hyde Park corner area. We had been told that was where we should go to see the sights. We walked through the crowded beautiful park. There were little groups of people standing around individuals who were preaching. We stopped and listened to some of them. Some were preaching about the war, some about government. Some were from India and the Far East.

Cross and I stopped and listened to several of the speakers. After a while, I told Cross, "Lets get away from these people. They are nuts." We walked on down the street, looking for a place where we might spend the night.

I stopped and talked to a Bobby, and asked him where we might find a hotel. He pointed and said, "Try that one." Then he pointed to another area and said, "Try them town houses down the street."

We stopped at the hotel that he had pointed to. The woman at the desk said they didn't have any rooms. The hotel was full of officers. We understood what she meant pretty quickly. She didn't have rooms for enlisted men. Officers were checking in.

We walked on down the street until we found the town house row. There was a Salvation Army in one of them. We were able to get two bunks for the night. The lady gave us a ticket and

we paid her. There were four cots in a room with a community bath room.

Cross and I felt that, since we had a place to lay our head for the night, we would go out and explore the town for a while. We started walking around, looking at the sights. We stopped and bought torches. We didn't bring ours from the base and we knew we would need them in the dark streets.

It was getting late. We began to look for a place to eat. We got in a line to go into a restaurant. Up walks Dabbs of all people and got in line with us. As we all were standing in line waiting for a table, Dabbs said, "I'll see you later." I asked, "Where are you going?" Dabbs said, "Did you see that girl who came by the door?" I said, "Yes." Cross said, "What about her?" "Well, she gave me the eye," Dabbs said. "She wants me to follow her." I told Dabbs, "You must be dreaming. I didn't see her do anything."

Dabbs took off and before he had reached the corner, he and the girl were walking arm in arm together down the street.

I asked Cross, "Did you see the girl do anything or look at Dabbs?" Cross said, "No. That Dabbs is something else."

We finally got in the restaurant after a long wait. There wasn't much to select to eat. Meat pie, fish and chips, potatoes and black bread.

We tried the meat pie, crumpets and tea. It was something to fill your stomach, was about all I could say about the food. After we finished, we sat at the table for a while, watching the other GIs and a few girls.

When we left the restaurant it was dark outside. The curtains and shades had been pulled over the windows across the front of the restaurant so German planes couldn't see anything in the dark below.

Cross and I took out our little torches and tried to find our way down the street to the Salvation Army town house area.

As we began to walk down the street, the air raid sirens started. "My God!" I said. "An air raid." The searchlights were sweeping the sky above the buildings. Then the anti-aircraft guns began firing. Guns were shooting all around us. Some sounded like they were on top of some of the buildings.

We continued to walk on down the street. A voice behind us said, "Yank! Mind your torch, mind your torch. Better get off the street." We pointed our torches at the ground and turned them on for a few seconds and then off, so we could see where we were going. I could hear people but I couldn't see them. Flak guns must

have been all around us. We could hear them everywhere. When they fired they shook the ground.

I heard something like steel hitting the sidewalk and the street. I flashed my torch around and saw pieces of steel on the ground almost as big as my hand.

Cross said, "If it goes up it has to come down." I said, "Not on me." We got under the first building door front that we came to and stood there.

I said, "It would be a hell of a note if we got killed walking down the street in this war." We stayed under the doorway until the all clear siren sounded. Then we continued walking down the dark street. Every once in a while, Cross would shine his torch on some GI and his girl friend standing up against a building wall as we walked on by.

With the help of a Bobby, we finally found the Salvation Army town house. We went to our room and tried to get some sleep. During the night the air raid sirens sounded for a raid two times. We just lay there and listened to the guns shoot and bombs hitting some place in the distance.

After almost a sleepless night we got up, cleaned up, and had crumpets and tea for breakfast in the front part of the Salvation Army building.

Cross suggested that we go see the Thames River and London Bridge so we started walking again. It was still very early in the morning. As we walked through some strange areas that we had not seen the day before, we passed a large numbers of buildings that were bombed out. There was nothing but some walls standing and piles of bricks. Total destruction.

As we approached the river area, several English women stopped us and tried to start a conversation. They were all the same. "Hello, Yank. I see you are airmen. Have you been in London very long? You can enjoy London for only two pounds. What say, Yank?" Cross would look at me. I would shake my head and say no. Some of the women were tempting enough to almost say yes, for they were very pretty. One girl said that she lived with her mother and for four pounds would give us a bath and fix us something to eat.

We kept on walking, with one occasionally following and talking to us as we walked on. I guess we were about the first GIs out on the street that early in the morning and that was why so many girls were approaching us. You would soon see the same woman talking to another GI, usually one who was alone.

We got to the Thames River and found the London Bridge. The road over the bridge was blocked off. We walked around the barricade and onto the bridge. A Bobby called out to us, "Yanks, you shouldn't be out on the bridge." We turned around and came back by its old towers and walked on.

From the bridge we walked along the Thames for a long way. We stopped and sat on some stone seats by a waist high wall along the river. As we sat there by the river talking about the prostitutes that had been approaching us, I began to tell Cross about a prostitute back at the Memphis hotel where I worked before I was put in the Army.

I told Cross that I had always made it a point to follow up on the engineer's work, to be sure there were no complaints. "One morning I went to a room where a heating radiator had been installed by the night engineer. I knocked on the door and a soft voice said, 'Come in.' I entered the room and there were two men and three very pretty girls. I asked if I could check the radiator to see if it was leaking. As I dropped down on my knees and felt the bottom of the radiator, a sweet voice behind me said, 'Will you check my radiator?' Without looking around, I said, 'Yes, Mamm.' As I turned to get up, there she was behind me with her dress pulled up to her hips and no panties on. You know, about the level my face was. I must have turned several colors. 'Mamm!' I said, 'I am on duty and will have to check it for you later.' I got up and got the hell out of that room. Sometimes surprises are just too much for you."

Cross said, "I am not so sure that I would have walked out." I said, "A lot of things like that happen when you work at a hotel."

That day in the hotel seemed so long ago now.

We got up and walked toward the palace where the King and Queen were supposed to stay, talking about the prostitutes as we walked.

We walked by the big fence that surrounded the palace yards and the gate. Then we headed for Big Ben which you could hear all over London when it chimed the hours. It was quite some walk to see some of the sights. We ended up back at Hyde Park. We stood around and listened to some of the nuts on their little boxes talking. Some of them were talking and no one was even listening to them. Some of the speeches didn't ever have any meaning.

We found a pub and went inside, looking for a place to eat. A young girl came over to us and got us a table. Then she sat down

with us. We bought her a drink and something to eat. We both talked to her for about an hour and I guess she finally decided that we were not going to go with her, so she said goodbye and left us.

I said to Cross, "Why didn't you get up and go with her?" He said, "Answer your own question. Why didn't you?" Both of us agreed there was too much of a chance to take. We had enough troubles without having sexual disease troubles.

We came out of the pub and thought that we would try riding the subway. We found steps on the corner and down several long flights of steps we went. Boy, these steps went way down in the ground. There were old people sitting on the landings of each flight of stairs. When we reached the subway area, there were old and young people sitting and lying all along the walls. They looked like they had been there for some time. Some seemed to be living there.

We got on a subway train and rode most of the evening. We got to the end of the line and got off. We walked up to the ground level and looked around. Most everything we saw was bombed out. What a waste it was. We stopped at a shop in a little row of shops and met a young Jewish man about our age. He wanted to go to America. He told us his story about getting out of Germany. His whole family was living in one room in the back of the store.

He wanted to give us anything that he had in the little shop. We thanked him, and wouldn't take anything. He came up to us and put his arms around our neck, and then kissed our hands. He said, "Americans soldiers don't get over in this part of London very much, especially American airmen. Thank you, thank you for being here, and please, airmen, go safely." We thanked him for being so nice to us. We walked on, trying to find the subway entrance. Everything in the area seemed to be destroyed. Block after block, nothing but bomb damage. Cross said, "This is what is left after a bombing." I agreed and thought, "All this must come to a end some way or nothing will be left."

I said, "Let's find the subway and get out of here." I wanted to get back to Hyde Park corner, for that was the only place that I could use as a reference point to get to the Salvation Army town house. I sure didn't know where I was now. We went down the next subway entrance we came to. Somehow we got on a subway train that was going by Hyde Park. There was almost no one on the entire subway train. There were only one or two people sitting with us in our coach. Cross and I sat in the middle of the coach and two other people sat at one end.

At the next station the subway stopped. A group of English Home Guards got on. They all were about half drunk. One of the guards looked at us and said in Cockney, "Look what. Two bloody Yanks." He came down by us and stood in the aisle. He pulled out a long bladed knife and started waving it at us, saying, "I have two bloody Yanks to rip up." Cross had already stuck his right hand under his coat and pulled his .45 automatic up from his holster. I had done the same thing and mine was ready to fire.

I told Cross, "If he gets any closer, we will have a dead guard on our hands and maybe several more." Cross said, "I am with you. I will get this one and you take the one behind him." I asked Cross, "Do you have a shell in the chamber?" He said, "Yes, cocked and ready." The English Home Guard was getting closer and was being encouraged by his buddies.

A Home Guard officer saw us with our right hand under our left coat lapel, and I believe began to see what was about to happen. He ran back and grabbed the Limey Home Guard and said to him, "Can't you see the wings on those Yanks? They are airmen." Two other Home Guards were now holding the Guard with the knife and taking it away from him.

The Home Guard officer apologized to us. I released my grip on my .45 automatic, closed the hammer and pushed it down in my holster. Cross did the same thing. I told the Home Guard Officer, "I'm glad you stopped this because it was going to turn out to be a bad thing with a lot of soldiers hurt."

He said, "Yanks, when I saw the wings, I knew that you were armed. God Bless You. We need you. Please, accept my apology." Every thing got quiet. At the next stop, the English Home Guards left our subway coach.

It was several more stops before we got to Hyde Park corner. When we got off I was still shaking. Cross ask me, "Were you going to shoot the guy?" I said, "Without a second thought. In another second he would have had a bullet in him or be dead. The funny thing was, I wasn't scared a bit when it was happening." Cross said he wasn't scared until it was all over. "That was the same with me," I said. "I just knew it had to be done."

We began to find our way and headed back to the Salvation Army town house. We stopped in a pub near the Salvation Army and sat watching the soldiers and civilians playing darts. I bought a bottle of ale and stretched it through the rest of the evening. Dart games were the center of attraction. There were two games going

on, one on each end of the pub. Soldiers outnumbered the women in the pub about ten soldiers to one woman.

We left the pub late and went on to our room at the Salvation Army, and began to get settled down when the air raid sirens started wailing again.

We didn't know where a shelter was so we just lay on the cot and listened.

Cross and I were up early the next morning. I really don't think we slept at all during the night with the air raid sirens and gunfire. I felt that I had enough of London. I told Cross that I was going to find a cab and go to the train station. Cross said he was going to stay another day.

I told him to be careful and I got a cabby to take me to Liverpool station. I waited until the afternoon for a train.

I stood around reading the papers and watching people. The headlines were about the bombing raids that I had been on in Germany. While I waited, several English women approached me and wanted me to go with them. I knew that they were all prostitutes.

Finally, I was on the train heading for Tivetshall, the train station at Tibenham. The trip going back to the base seemed a lot longer.

Two English soldiers on the train tried to talk to me all the way back and I could hardly understand anything they were saying. They were talking in Cockney, and some other form of English. They were trying to be nice but I just couldn't understand what they were talking about most of the time.

I was glad to get off the train in Tivetshall, and get back to the base. As soon as I was on the base I went to the mess hall to eat. The food looked good. I was either getting used to Army food, or the mess sergeant was getting to be a better cook. It was better than the food that I got in London. We were beginning to have some meat and potatoes that you could cut with a knife instead of eating with a spoon. When I didn't fly, I could eat some of the beans.

## Nearly in the Channel

After eating, I walked by the mail room and found several more letters. I began to read them as I walked back to the hut. I lay

on my bunk and read the letters from Elizabeth, over and over. It helped.

Elizabeth wrote that the car tires were completely bad and she had to sell the car. There were no tires to be bought. Elizabeth was now riding in a car pool, to and from work with other girls on her shift. She had received the bracelet and lapel watch and loved them. Her last letter was only five days old. I sent the package the last of December from the bank in Norwich and she had received it. I wouldn't have that problem any more to worry about.

The next day, the weather turned bad again. By nightfall, everyone was back from London. The kinds of stories they were telling were almost unbelievable - from girl stories to the story we told about the Home Guard knife attack. Dabbs told us he had spent the three nights with a different woman. None of us could beat that story. Dabbs said, "These silver wings brought women to me like flies to sugar."

That was Dabbs.

On January 17, we were called for a mission. We dressed out and went to briefing. The mission was to be to Frankfurt, Germany.

We got off the ground in bad weather and crossed the channel into the enemy coast. The weather was closing in on us, and we received a recall. So back to base we went and managed to land on a runway that we could barely see. We got out of our flight clothes and went back to the hut.

Two days later, we again dressed out and went to briefing. The target was still Frankfurt. Visibility was a little better. We could see the runway on takeoff. We were able to form in clear weather above the cloud cover. We climbed to altitude and crossed the enemy coast. Flak was coming up to our right. The clouds were looking bad in front of us. Before we got to them we were recalled. Mission scrubbed. Back to the hut.

The next day, we dressed out and went to briefing. The mission was still to Frankfurt. "Maybe this is it," I said to Cross. Visibility was better on the ground but far from good. Again we formed above the clouds and climbed to our altitude. We crossed the enemy coast line. Flak started coming up in front of us. Wright received a recall. The mission was scrubbed and we turned and flew back to base.

Back at the base, during debriefing, I learned that the last four mission tries were recorded as "training flights" even though

we had received enemy fire on three of the four flights and had crossed into the enemy coast three times.

On the cold morning of January 24, Cross crawled out of his bunk and grabbed the old rocking chair by the cold pot bellied stove. He began chopping it up. We had found it beside the unfinished latrine where the Limey construction worker liked to sit, rather than work on the latrine. He liked to sit on it when he had his tea and crumpets every morning. Cross said, "We could make a lot better use of it as kindling to help get our fire started in the morning." Wood was hard to get. I sat on my bunk, watching him chop up the rocking chair, listening to the radio play too loud. The rest of the crew had a card game going. The men who were not playing cards were still in their sacks.

The door to the hut opened. Someone said, "Attention."

Jimmy Stewart walked in and quickly said, "At ease, fellows."

A general was behind him. They were inspecting the barracks and huts - and maybe the flight crews. Cross never looked up or stopped chopping on the chair. He was a strange sight.

Stewart looked at Cross and turned to the general and said, "General Timberlake, these fellows have been flying too hard for too long. I think they need to get their rest."

They turned and started out of the hut. The general nodded at us and said, "Keep up the good work, men."

Stewart winked at us over his shoulder and tossed us a little salute.

Later that afternoon, when we were all back at the hut, the door opened and in walked Stewart again. Cross saw him first and said, "Attention." We all started getting up.

I noticed he was wearing a new gold leaf on his shoulder. He had been made a major and had said nothing to us about it.

Stewart looked at us and said, "All right. At ease, fellows. You're not going to stand at attention anyway."

Stewart walked up to the stove and began to warm his hands over it. Then he shivered and sat down by me on the end of my bunk, close to the stove. He looked up at us and said, "At ease, fellows." We began to slump back down on our bunks. We all felt tired.

Still warming his hands at the stove, Stewart said slowly "Fellows, don't you think when the general visits our field that we ought to kind of salute him sometimes? Don't you really think so?"

He rubbed his chin and let his eyes sweep over us slowly. "Right," he said, getting up. "I'll see you boys." He strolled out.

I said, "I think he was trying to get a message to us. I think we had better get on the ball." Cook said, "Well, he should tell us when these generals are going to come walking into our hut. Then we could be on the ball."

The rest of the evening was spent playing cards, and talking about Stewart's new gold leaf on his shoulder. Cross said, "If you hadn't seen that gold leaf you would think that he was just another long, lanky old GI because he sure doesn't look like a major."

I said, "What is a major supposed to look like?" Cross said, "I don't know. But I sure want to keep the one we got." He looked at me. "Didn't you think he looked sort of tired?" I nodded. "Damned tired. Wright said Stewart is flying more missions than headquarters wants him to."

The next morning we were notified that Wright's crew would have a training flight at 1300 hours, and Jimmy Stewart would be our check pilot.

I was beginning to think, "Well, this is the way he's going to close in on us." All morning we talked about having to make a training flight after we had six combat missions under our belt.

Cook said, "Maybe this is Stewart's way of making us shape up."

At 1 p.m., all of the enlisted men were at the hard stand and checking out the airplane, fully dressed out for combat flight. Cook, Tyler and I preflighted the airplane, and had everything in order. The crew's officers, Wright, Buckey, Alexander, Wittman, and Stewart all walked out to the plane together.

We were all standing around the ship. Not at attention, but almost.

Stewart walked up and said, "You fellows ready? Good. Let's go."

We tried to do everything by the numbers. Just to show off. Even Dabbs was on the ball.

Everyone took their positions. We all reported on the intercom that we were ready and in position. Wright taxied out to the runway, rolled down the runway and lifted off. Wheels came up. "Left wheel up and locked," I reported crisply. "Right wheel up and locked," came the sharp report from Tyler. "Nose wheel up and locked," announced Wittman from the nose position. I thought, "We sound pretty good."

We climbed to altitude and flew to the north, and out over the ocean. We checked out our guns and returned to a lower altitude, turning toward London. We all made sure that we reported when we went on oxygen. We quickly answered all questions that were asked.

Everyone kept his mouth shut and off the intercom when not on combat business. We used the intercom only to report something or to answer a question.

Stewart came back to the waist and looked around. Then he went back through the bulkhead door and up to the flight deck. We were all alertly at our positions. We acted like we didn't see him.

After three hours and forty-five minutes of this, we landed back at the airfield. We taxied over to the hard stand and parked and cut the engines. We unloaded and were standing around waiting for the truck to pick us up.

Major Stewart was leaning against the wheel and about to bump his head on the wing. He was so tall. He said, "Well, I guess you fellows can fly this thing. Let's go back and get some coffee." The truck came and Stewart got in the back end with us. Alexander sat in the front seat with the driver.

"These damned trucks ride just like a bucking horse," Stewart said on the way back to operations. He seemed to be in better spirits.

We went on back to the locker room, still wondering what that flight was all about.

The next few days passed with us still talking and thinking about the training flight.

Cross and I went to the ship and got a few tools. We came back and put the doors on the latrine. It looked like that damned Limey construction worker was never going to get it done.

The weather was still wet and cold with fog drifting between our huts area every morning until about noon. In the evening it would clear up and German bombers would come in on their nightly raids. It was every night.

We all would sit outside and watch the searchlights pinpoint the German bombers. We could see and hear flak firing in the distance.

Rumors started that the Germans were dropping men to infiltrate or spy on our general area. This made us clean up our carbines and be sure that we had ammunition for them and knew where the carbines were stored. I always kept my carbine under my

bed with the clip pulled part way out. I had not shot it, even to practice with, since it was issued to me.

I thought, "I guess you'd better be ready for anything." It really hadn't crossed my mind that we could be attacked, even on the ground here at the base. Now that was something else to think about. We went down to supply and checked out more ammunition for our .45 automatics, and our carbines to make sure that we would have plenty and were ready.

Dabbs stood in the back door of the hut and fired his .45 and his carbine into the open field. Cross, Cook, Van Bogelen, Tyler and I went to the firing abutment and practiced shooting at targets. We all had qualified as marksmen back in the States. We had been issued a carbine when we were issued flight gear in England. The supply sergeant told us that we could have a Thompson submachine gun to fire at the abutment when we wanted it.

Target practice became a daily routine. Our evenings and nights were spent playing Black Jack. Dabbs would get mad when he wouldn't win and would start a game of poker with some of the two crews. It was about half and half, poker players and Black Jack players.

The last mission that Group had put up was on January 21. Medcalf's crew flew on it and Earl Doggett had been dragging around ever since he came from the flight. None of the crew had said much about the mission. We tried to get Earl to play cards with us. He said he didn't want to. He just wanted to stay in his bunk. Someone said Earl had not received a letter from home in a long time.

The evening of January 28, Wright came by. This was the first time that we had seen any of our officers since our training flight with Jimmy Stewart. I asked Wright if we did all right on our training flight. He said we did fine. "We're flying a mission tomorrow."

That kind of announcement always put butterflies in my stomach. When Wright left, we all got quiet and flopped on our bunks. I filled up the pot bellied stove and lay back on the sack, trying to read some of Elizabeth's last letters to make me feel better. I turned off my light. Cross turned off the radio. I lay there looking at the ceiling in the dark.

We all felt real tired.

I must have fallen asleep. The Jeep woke me up when it stopped outside. I hadn't even taken my clothes off. I was still in them. The sergeant walked in. He walked by our crew, touching

each of us. It was 4:30 a.m. It was cold, damp and foggy as we walked to the mess hall. What a hell of a day for a mission.

We had not flown combat since January 11.

The easy living had gotten to us: A pass to London, lying around in the hut, just taking things easy, feeling sorry for ourselves.

We walked to the mess hall through the mud, griping about why we had to fly when Medcalf's crew was still in the sack. When we got out of bed, we all had made all the noise that we could, building a fire, arguing over the hot water that we had heated in the helmet. The damned mud path was getting to me. We had always griped about the mud but kind of laughed it off, as many times as we have walked down the fence line on the path. Nothing seemed to be right this early morning.

At the mess hall, Tyler was complaining that the powdered eggs were runny and not cooked. I headed for the fruit cocktail bucket, and even it looked like it was more syrup than fruit.

After fooling around in the mess hall, we finally got to the locker room and dressed out. Everything seemed to be going wrong while I was dressing. Cross would keep saying, "Don't you know how to put your flight gear on?" I tried to ignore him.

We were all on time to briefing. All our officers were already there when we came in. Even Wright beat us there.

The curtains were pulled from over the chart and there it was again. The red ribbon was still on the same path. The target was still Frankfurt. This would be the fifth time to try to hit Frankfurt.

The briefing officers said Frankfurt was down in the middle of Germany. Spitfires were going to escort us part of the way there. P-47s and some of the new P-51s and P-38s would escort us the rest of the way. There were never enough of the fighters to protect all the formations.

The target would be overcast. The ships would be equipped to drop their bombs by radar. Expected flak would be heavy.

Group was sending out twenty-eight airplanes. The briefing officer wished us well and sent us on our way. Then that long "short walk" out to the trucks and the ride to the plane waiting for us on the hard stand.

When our truck stopped beside the hard stand, our airplane wasn't there. We were to fly the airplane next to it, Number 562, which belonged to another squadron. Bullet Serenade was Number 439. The ground crew said our bomber was in the hangar for repairs. They had found a live incendiary projectile that had not yet

exploded inside one of her self-sealing fuel tanks. My thoughts went back quickly to the two enemy fighters that were on our tail the last time. I thought, "God was with us. A live incendiary in one of our gas tanks!"

## Trying to Hide in the Clouds

Right off, Number 562 just wasn't as good as our old 439. Cross said the ball turret door wouldn't close good. I didn't think the gun mount at the left waist window was in the right place. It wasn't in the center of the window. Cook and I checked the airplane over good. The new plane made us anxious but neither one of us could find anything exactly that would keep us from flying it. Everyone loaded up and got ready to start.

The flare went up at the tower and the mission was on. Wright taxied out into position. The weather was looking pretty good. There was an overcast at about 5,000 feet. Visibility on the ground was good. We turned onto the runway and down it we went and lifted off at 8:03 a.m.

Our bomb load was 4,000 pounds of incendiaries. Someone had finally clustered them in a package and put a nose cone and tail fins on them. This would allow the bombs to drop between the aircraft below the formations before coming apart. I thought, "I don't know who did this but they sure did save a lot of airplanes from getting hit. The inventor should get a medal of some kind."

Cross was in the bomb bay, removing the arming wires from the bombs. We were at about 4,000 feet, just under the cloud coverage, when a bright flash and then a boom came from our right side. We felt a heavy concussion. Wright said someone on the radio had told him that two B-24s had hit and pieces were falling all over our airfield. I thought, "Thank goodness I didn't see them like I did the last time when two hit in our flight path."

Everything was doing okay on the airplane. Wright formed without any trouble. It looked as if we only had twenty-five aircraft in our formation instead of twenty-eight. Maybe the other three would catch up with us. The two aircraft that hit each other over our field were not supposed to be from our group.

This seventh mission was now formed and ready to go out over the ocean. It just didn't feel right, being in Number 562 instead of our Bullet Serenade. Oxygen was okay, the heated suit was

working, guns fired okay and bombs were armed. Now the enemy coast line was coming up.

Our first fighter escort was to be Spitfires but P-47s showed up, right on time. They were over us and under us, and sweeping in front of us in groups of four. What a pretty sight they were. Even the flak wasn't too bad. It was coming up spotty in front of us and a little along the way to the right of us. It looked like we were going to have a nice ride all the way. The land area was completely covered with clouds. The formation was now laying down a very long con trail. The group beside us to the right at 4 o'clock were making con trails that were miles long and were very pretty.

Cook said on the intercom, "The P-47s are turning back. Watch for trouble." Wright said, "Look for Spitfires. They should be showing up."

The P-47s had now been gone for over ten minutes and still no Spitfires.

Buckey Kroll, the copilot, called out on the intercom, "Fighters high at 1 o'clock. Look at them high in front of us." We were flying left wing man in the second flight. Wright pulled the airplane in closer to the lead man. I watched out my waist window and thought, "If we get any closer, our right wing tip will be in his left waist window."

Wright said, "The damned fighters are dropping something." The Germans were dropping long chains. They are also dropping parachutes with something hanging from them. "The chutes are drifting toward us," Buckey said on the intercom. Wright moved the airplane down and under the lead ship. I came in on the intercom:

"I see the chains passing the end of our left wing tip." The ship had moved just in time.

Wittman in the nose turret said, "Here comes a parachute bomb, and another one behind it."

"I see them," Cook in the top turret said. "Eleven o'clock, eleven o'clock. They are going to pass us at 10 o'clock by our left wing. Look out, Wright, look out! They are going to hit us!"

Wright moved to the right a little more. The two parachutes floated on by our left wing tip. Wright had done it again.

I said, "FW 190 coming in at 10 o'clock." Before I could shoot at him, the canopy on his airplane came off and the German pilot just bailed out. It didn't look like anything was wrong with his airplane. The pilot's parachute opened several hundred feet from his airplane. The FW 190 passed a few feet under us. I could look

down into the empty cockpit of the fighter as it passed under me. Tyler said it was headed down for the clouds below. It looked like the German pilot just wanted to get out of the fight or he was trying to ram his airplane into ours. Cook called out, "Cable falling at 11 o'clock." I could see something snaking its way down toward the formation and passing to our left. It looked like a long twisting snake, or maybe a cable.

Tyler came on the intercom, saying, "P-38s! P-38s coming from 4 o'clock." The P-38s began to dogfight with the FW 190s. Several of the FW 190s were going down with smoke coming from them and P-38s on their tails.

We were now starting our bombing run and the flak could be seen coming through the clouds and bursting in front of us. I would never have known where the city was if the flak had not been bursting above the cloud overcast.

The bomb bay doors opened, and soon we were in the flak over the city. Flak was now bursting all around us. Wittman said, "Bombs away." The airplane jerked up from the loss of weight. I watched the bombs fall for some distance away from the formation. The nose cones and tail fins came off the bomb clusters and opened up like match sticks from a box and scattered everywhere. The bomb bay doors closed, and the wind slowed down as it blew through the waist of the airplane.

As I looked back out the window I could see black smoke coming up through the white cloud cover over the city. I looked at the black smoke rising and thought, "Man, that radar bomb sight must have found some kind of a target to hit."

As we came out of the flak area, the P-38s were high and above the formation of B-24s. From the ground cloud cover, two FW 190s came up and attacked a B-24 in the group just behind us at 8 o'clock. As the B-24 winged over, four airmen bailed out.

The P-38s saw what had happened and went straight for the two FW 190s. The two FW 190s flopped over and headed down for the cloud cover with four P-38s on their tails.

P-38s were now all around us. Some of the P-38s looked like they really had been in a fight. They must have had their hands full, keeping the fighters away from us. Three of the P-38s had part of their wings and tails missing. One lone P-38 pulled up under our left wing, so close I could see the pilot as if he were in our ship. He was straight out from me at 9 o'clock. One of his engines was feathered, and he had partial flaps down.

He flew along, tucked up near us as if we were a mother hen. I was glad to have him near us. Wright said, "Keep your eye on him. He is so close back there, I can't see anything but the front of him." I told Wright the P-38 was so close that he was all I could see.

A single German FW 190 must have thought the P-38 tucked up by us was an easy target, and would be easy to take out. The FW 190 came in from 8 o'clock high, sliding between our group of B-24s and the group of B-24s to our rear and left at 7 o'clock. Everyone had been watching the P-38 beside us. He had dropped a little below us on our left. It looked like everyone in the two bomber groups saw the FW 190 coming in. You could see a pattern of fire coming from every bomber and converging on the FW 190. I started firing at him over the top of the P-38.

The FW 190 just totally disintegrated above us. Parts of the debris went through our formation and over the second flight's wing man.

The P-38 seemed to be getting above us now. I looked out the right waist window and our lead ship was above and in front of us. We were losing altitude. The P-38 was with our lead ship. The formation was leaving us at 2 o'clock high. The P-38 was staying in the formation spot where we had been.

Wright called out on the intercom, "We are losing power in number one engine. Robbie, do you see anything wrong?" I looked out the window at the engine and said, "No." About that time the exhaust mixture looked richer than on the number two engine. Wright said, "We have lost a supercharger on number one engine. We can't keep up. We're really losing altitude."

I could see the formation high and way ahead of us.

Alexander said on the intercom, "We're still fifty miles from the coast."

Wright said, "Number two engine is going down. It's losing power. We will have to try to hide in the cloud coverage."

The P-38s were up with the formation of B-24s. They all were beginning to look like little dots in the sky. We were now down by ourself, on the top of the cloud cover, trying to stay just inside it. Black smoke was coming from both the number one and two engines.

Buckey told Wright, "We may have to feather number one. It's doing nothing now but windmilling."

I looked out the waist window, up high, to see if any of the German fighters had spotted us below them yet. They loved to

knock off cripples. Our formation and the fighter protection were now up there somewhere, out of sight.

Things didn't look too good. We had seen what this situation could quickly lead to, many times before.

We scanned the skies.

Wright was trimming the airplane, trying to keep the left wing up. In front of us the cloud cover was ending. We were down to about 6,000 feet. We had not received small arms fire from the ground that anyone knew about or had seen. Being this low, small arms from the ground could be a deadly problem.

I could see the ocean in the distance in front of us. We only had to make it back across the North Sea to England. But the sea could be deadly. Wright said, "Get rid of all the weight you can. I'm having a hard time with this thing. If we loose another engine that will be it."

Buckey said, "We had better feather number one."

I watched the propeller stop on number one and just sit there. I said, "Number one engine feathered." Wright answered, "Roger. Confirmed." I said, "Wright, do we get rid of any loose weight?" "Yes," he said. Tyler, Cross, Dabbs, and I began to throw out the window the heavy flak suits, empty ammunition boxes, spent .50 caliber shells, our steel helmets, heavy clothing, ammunition, guns, oxygen walk-around bottles - everything that we could find loose or tear loose. There was nothing but the dingy radio left that was loose. We were defenseless - we had thrown all the plane's guns overboard.

Wright said, "Number two engine has got to go. It is just windmilling. Feathering number two engine."

The left wing dropped a little and I confirmed that the engine was feathered. As I watched the engine feathered I saw the ocean waves splashing a spray. I could feel some of the spray when I stuck my head out the window. I said on the intercom, "Wright. are we going to ditch?" Wright said, "No, not yet." I checked my May West to be sure that I had CO-2 bottles in it. Wright asked Cook, "How much fuel do we have on board?" Cook turned the fuel gauges on and said, "Very little. I don't believe we should dump any of the fuel." Wright said, "Are you sure?" Cook said, "Yes."

I walked through the bomb bay to the flight deck and looked at the gauges with Cook. There wasn't very much fuel. Enough to get us home if we could stay in the air.

I walked back through the bomb bay to the left waist and plugged in my intercom. Wright was saying to Van Bogelen, "Send

out a May Day and give our position." Alexander gave him a position and said, "I will bring it to you on a piece of paper."

Wright turned the radio on the intercom and began to talk to a Limey rescue boat somewhere. The Limey said, "Come on down, Yank. We been watching you." Wright said, "Roger. Not until we have to. Hang on."

I looked everywhere for a boat and didn't see one. All I could see was a cold wet ocean too close to me. The Limey came back on the radio, "Right, Yank. We will get you if you do."

I still couldn't see a boat.

Wright suddenly said, "English coast dead ahead." Buckey said, "England, there you are." Wright said to Buckey, "Let's get this damned thing up in the air a little and we got it made."

Wright pulled up some. We were not 500 feet off the ground when we passed over the English coast line. At least we were over land. I thought, "Thank God. I will not freeze to death in water that's fifteen degrees above zero." I wondered how long I could have stood it. Wright said, "I think I can stay at this altitude. I'll try to get to the base." We didn't have much altitude. Wright found the field at Tibenham and went straight in and sat down.

Our formation had already landed and finished when we walked into the debriefing room. They knew that we were coming back.

There were twenty-eight sent out from Group. Twenty-six made it over the target and we lost none. The base had been informed by the British that we had made it to landfall and had kept track of us all the way back to the base. Operations hadn't marked us off. We didn't know that we were being watched by anybody. We returned after seven hours and thirty minutes of flying and running.

## Stewart Handles a Gripe

I wasn't sure what to think about that seventh mission. It had been charmed or jinxed from the start. It took five tries to make it to Frankfurt, and then it was in someone else's beat up airplane. The debriefing officer told us that we had been on the largest raid of the war, to date. Maybe he was trying to make us feel good. We had three bullet holes in the right tail of the airplane.

We all walked to the flight locker room together, glad to be back in one piece. I was getting out of my heated suit and Cross said, "We will have to go to quartermaster to get some new flight gear, and a steel helmet." "We won't have our steel helmets to heat water in tonight," I said. "Maybe we can go get replacements after we get a little rest," Tyler said. I said, "The hell with the helmet and clothes. I'm going to hit the sack."

We all stopped by the mess hall and had some tea and donuts. Then down the mud path to our hut. Medcalf's crew wasn't there. Everything was quiet. All of us hit the bunks without a single bit of conversation. The hut was silent.

We were all asleep when Medcalf's crew came roaring into the hut, waking us up. They had been in a briefing most of the day. Earl Doggett and Dewey were trying to tell us about pieces of the B-24s falling all over the base this morning. Even bodies coming down in parachutes from the cloud cover. Bombs going off in and near the ground crews barracks. Fragmentation bombs had fallen in one hut and killed several GIs. They were all excited about it.

Dabbs told them, "If you wanted to see something you should have been with us today." I said, "We saw the flash in the clouds this morning at takeoff. We felt the concussion when the B-24s hit each other. We were just breaking out above the overcast when it happened." Tyler said, "Lets get some sleep. The hell with airplanes. We can talk tomorrow."

I made a few notes in my diary and started a letter to Elizabeth. I took her picture from my pocket, kissed it and put the picture on the shelf above my bunk. It helped. I thanked God for getting us safely back from the seventh mission.

Doggett said, "Tomorrow is Sunday." He sounded strange.

Instinct made me open my eyes and look at him. I didn't know one day from the next, except that the Limey brought our laundry back on Fridays so I knew when Friday was.

Days were all the same. Always cold, damp, foggy, rainy. I wondered why they just didn't cut all the antiaircraft balloons loose from this damned island called England and let it sink in the ocean.

The next morning arrived as they all did, damp and wet. I got myself out of the bunk at 0900 hours. I turned Cross' radio on to hear what the Germans were saying about the raid yesterday.

When Cross got up, we went to the quartermaster supply, and checked out some new gear, steel helmets, flak suits. Cross had to have another heavy coat for he had thrown his out the window. From there we went to the medical officer. Cross needed

new morphine tubes to put back on the sleeve of his jacket. He signed several papers before they gave them to him. The medical office already knew from the debriefing officer about Cross losing his supply of morphine over the channel. We both took everything to the locker room but the steel helmets. Then we stopped back by the mess hall and ate.

In the mess hall the knives and forks were so greasy that you could hardly hold them in your hand. Cross raised hell with the mess sergeant. The sergeant didn't pay much attention to him.

As we were leaving, Cross saw Jimmy Stewart outside. He ran over and grabbed up a bunch of greasy knives and forks. We went out the door following Major Stewart. I wasn't sure what Cross was going to do now. He had both hands full of greasy knives, forks, and spoons. "Major Stewart!" Cross called out as we walked up behind him. "Major Stewart! Major Stewart!"

Stewart turned around and Cross said, "Sir, would you look at all this grease! If we use these things with this much grease on them, we never will be able to fly a mission. We will be sitting in the latrine most of the time."

Stewart looked at Cross and then at me. He rubbed his chin and said, "Gee, sergeant. I already talked to that mess sergeant once about this."

"It's a mess, all right," Cross said, waving the utensils.

Stewart said, "I told the guy he needs to save some of that grease to cook potatoes with and not put it all on our knives and forks. I guess I am just going to have to talk to him again."

"Yes, sir."

"Let me have those and I will try to find him and get him to try to wash them."

Cross handed the knives and forks to Stewart. Stewart looked at them and said, "They sure are greasy, aren't they?"

We both saluted Major Stewart as we turned to leave. He returned the salute holding the knives and forks in his hand. It was a funny salute. Then he went into the mess hall.

I told Cross, "We had better get. If the mess sergeant finds out that you got Stewart on him, you never will get anything to eat." Cross said, "I can't eat what he cooks anyway. It wouldn't make any difference."

I thought, "Well, we almost live on K rations anyway." We open and eat K rations in the hut all the time.



Jimmy Stewart considers problems.

It was Sunday. We spent the rest of the day, January 30, playing cards. Doggett, Tyler, and I were playing Black Jack. Cook, Van Bogelen, Phillip Bronstein, Stanley Trowse and James Crawford were in a big poker game. Poker was their thing. They played it most of the time.

The other two members of Medcalf's crew stayed in their bunks most of the time. I guess we spent more time on our bunks than doing anything else. Just lying there and feeling sorry for ourselves. The bunk was the only home that we could call ours. No one invaded your bunk without a fight or fuss. That was private personal property.

Doggett said, "The chaplain is going to start a church service in the briefing room on Sunday morning. We should all find out about it."

Doggett was from the Bible Belt in Arkansas and was a very religious young man. "Earl, maybe we can go next Sunday, if they have it. You can talk to the chaplain and find out about the service. They are going to build a chapel soon, the ground crew told me."

When we quit playing cards, I noticed Doggett lying on his bunk, reading his little pocket Bible. I always read a little of mine each night. I noticed that every time I got my Bible out to read, Cross would get his out. We never talked about religion among us but I noticed we all were thumbing the little pocket Bible more and more each night.

We knew we needed some kind of help.

Our group had sent a mission out again today. All the airplanes returned. Dewey said twenty-four went out and only twenty went over the target. Four had turned back.

Wright showed up at the hut late in the evening and said to be in full dress uniform tomorrow at 1000 hours. "We have to be in a formal formation. General Timberlake, Colonel Terrill, Major Stewart and some of the other officers will be there. So, everybody look sharp and stay on the ball." We nodded.

The next morning, the weather was cold and damp. The wind was blowing and making it feel even colder. The air crews were all lining up alongside squadron headquarters when we walked up. I said to Cook and Tyler, "Is this all the air crews that we have left?" It sure didn't look like many men were left in our four squadrons.

This was the first formal formation that I had been in since gunnery school. A band was playing.

We stood there in the wind about twenty minutes. It was so damned cold that I could hardly stand still. Major Stewart was standing with the 703rd Squadron in front of us.

General Timberlake and Colonel Terrill showed up.

We had all been waiting for the general and the colonel, standing there shaking from the cold. The general made a short speech. He said we had become combat ready and into operations quicker than any other group. "The 445th Group's bombing record is becoming the very best in the Eighth Air Force," he said.

The general then called out our names individually and asked us to step forward. A citation was read and he pinned the Air Metal on each of us for completing five combat missions over Europe. After he had presented the medals, he said, "I know you are all as cold as I am. Maybe not as cold as you get on a mission but cold enough not to be standing out here in the wind. Colonel Terrill, dismiss the formation."

The general had presented eighty-three Air Medals, one Cluster, and two Purple Hearts during the formation. We all thought it was an honor to have a general's handshake and have him pin a medal on each of us personally. The rest of the day was spent talking about the general and the cold weather.

The Air Medal came in a nice box with a ribbon and a lapel pin. I wrapped the lapel pin and put it in a letter to mail to Elizabeth.

When I walked to the mail room to mail the letter, I found several letters from home and one from Miami waiting for me. The letters from home were from my wife.

I opened her letters and started reading them as I walked back to the hut in the cold wind.

Back at the hut I opened the letter from Miami. It was from the hula dancer, Connie Alma Owens. "Where did she get my APO number?" I wondered.

I read Elizabeth's letters first. She said everything at home was all right. Toothpaste was hard to get. You had to turn in an old empty tube before you could buy a new one. Rationing was becoming a problem with lots of people. She was not using all of her ration stamps and had plenty. Most of the bills were paid, and she was even saving a little money.

Elizabeth was working every day and getting all the overtime work that she could handle.

They were building B-25 wings as fast as they could on three shifts at the factory. I sure was missing her. It seemed so

long ago that we were together. She didn't want me to worry about anything. Everyone in the family was well, Elizabeth wrote.

## Hula Dancer's Letter

I picked up Connie Owens' letter again. I was almost shocked. She was saying how much she had fallen in love with me. She said she would wait forever for me to return. We had only talked for about an hour on the base in Morrison Field, Florida. She said that I was her hero and asked that I send her a picture. There was a full three-page letter telling me all about herself. She said she had never fallen for anyone before on first sight like she had for me. I tried to think back. I was sure that I never led her to believe that I was in love with her. The only thing was that I held her hand, and she kissed me when she got on the bus. I even had my wedding ring on.

I thought at the time that she was trying to cheer up a lonely GI who was heading overseas. If I hadn't been married to the only girl I wanted in my life, Connie might have been a prospective wife. She was a very pretty girl. I knew when I was at Morrison Field that I would never see or hear from her again. I was flattered by her letter. It was nice to read. I knew this letter would be the last if I didn't answer it.

The cold day came to an end with us all playing cards. The Black Jack and poker games were in full swing. We had swapped the English pound bills back and forth across the table so much that they were getting worn out.

The next day, the English Limey construction worker came by to pick up the laundry. We asked if he could get our winter dress uniform cleaned. He looked at it and thought for a minute and said, "I can't wash this." I said, "It has to be dry cleaned." He asked, "What is that?"

Cook told the Limey that we would take care of the wool clothes, that he could forget it. Cook, Cross and I walked out to the airplane with our wool uniform pants and jackets. At the airplane, we filled some buckets with gasoline and washed the clothes in it. When we were through with the gasoline we poured it in the grass at the edge of the hard stand. We hung the clothes on the airplane to air out and get the high octane gasoline out of them.

We checked over the airplane after the repairs on her wing fuel tanks. The old girl was in good shape. When the uniforms aired out for a while, we all walked back to the hut. We had to hang the clothes outside the hut. If it started raining, one of us was going to bring them in.

Medcalf's crew was lying on bunks, except their first engineer. He and Dabbs had gone somewhere. They were two of a kind. I told Earl, "I'm pretty sure they've gone to town or to a pub somewhere." It was easy to get through the gate. You only had to tell the guard that you was going to walk to the train station to get a Limey paper and he would let you through. The train station wasn't far from the guard house.

By dark, Dabbs was back but Medcalf's first engineer had not come back. Late that evening, Medcalf came by the hut and told his crew that they would fly a mission tomorrow.

No one said anything about their first engineer leaving the base. Everyone was sure that he would be back sometime tonight.

Doggett and I tried to play Black Jack for a while. I could tell that he was worrying about the mission they had to fly the next day. I said, "Earl, let's take a walk." We walked down to the mail room and back.

## Death's Shadow Visits the Hut

As Earl and I walked back from the mail room, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "Robbie, I am really afraid today. I know I am going to die."

"What makes you think that you are going to die?"

"I just know it." he said.

"Earl," I said, "I get as scared as you do but I am going to do everything I can to stay alive. I am not going to give up. Earl, if you really expect to get killed, then you will because you will do something wrong. You don't have to give up. There is always a way."

We walked for a while without saying anything. We were about back to the hut when Earl said, "I don't think God wants me to live."

I said, "Earl. My God! What a thing to say. What is wrong with you?"

"I just have that feeling," he said. "I can't help it."

As I lay on the bunk, trying to go to sleep that night, I couldn't get my mind off what Earl had said.

The hut is always kind of dark at night except when all the lights are on. Cross' light was off. The two lights hanging from each end of the hut were off. My light was causing shadows on Medcalf's side of the hut.

As I lay there watching the shadows, I looked at Bronstein sitting on his bunk. Then I looked at Earl lying in his bunk. A sudden fear overcame me. The way the shadows were formed, they looked like death itself. I tried to get the thought out of my mind. When I looked again, there it was again, death sitting on Earl's bunk.

I reached up on the shelf and got Elizabeth's letters and started reading them. I got up and went to the latrine and came back, trying not to look at the Medcalf crew's side of the hut. I turned my light off and crawled into the bunk between my ten blankets, trying to keep my mind on Elizabeth. I wondered what it would be like, lying beside her.

It was a long night, lying there trying to get everything out of my mind. Sleep finally came over me.

The next thing I heard was the Jeep stopping in front of the hut. The sergeant came in and woke Medcalf's crew. He asked, "Where is your first engineer?" Someone said he had not come back from a pass. The sergeant said he would report it and get a replacement. Medcalf's crew was soon dressed and leaving the hut.

Earl came by the foot of my bunk, reached over and put his hand on my blankets where my foot was, and left.

After they left, I couldn't go back to sleep so I got up and put coal in the pot bellied stove. I poured some water from my canteen into my helmet, then put it on the stove to heat. The steel helmet had a black ring around the top of it where it fit the eye of the pot bellied stove.

I sat there wondering what this day would bring. I opened a package of K rations. This one had a can of cheese and ham. I opened the can which was about the size of a potted meat can in the States. I sat there chewing on the dog biscuits and eating the cheese and ham.

It was almost time for lunch before everyone got up. I had most of my personal work done before they got up. I brought in the wool uniforms that we had washed with gasoline. Most of the smell was gone. At least they didn't smell like perspiration.

Tyler, Cross, Dabbs and I walked to the mess hall for lunch together. I asked Dabbs, "Were you with Medcalf's first engineer yesterday?" He said, "We were together at a pub. He met a farmer's daughter who lived somewhere near the field. Why?" Cross said, "He didn't show up to fly a mission this morning." Dabbs said, "He told me it would be a couple of more days before he would make another mission."

I asked Dabbs if he knew where to find him. Dabbs said he didn't. After lunch, Cross and I walked over to the tower to see if anything had been heard from the mission that had gone out that morning. The tower told us that of twenty-eight airplanes out, twenty-six had returned. They were still waiting for two to return.

We found out that the mission was to Siricourt, France. Cross said, "That is just over the French coast line. It's not too bad a mission. Let's go on back to the hut. The other two planes will show up soon. Maybe they landed at another base."

We walked on back to the hut. When we arrived, Medcalf's first engineer was there, wanting to know where everybody was. Cross said, "All of your crew is on a mission. They are one of the crews that have not returned."

It was a big surprise to him. I told him to get himself over to operations office and explain to them. He took off running.

Cross said, "I sure wouldn't like to be in his shoes." Cook, Tyler, Van Bogelen and Dabbs drifted in. Cook said, "I don't think Medcalf's crew made it. Tyler said, "Maybe they landed at another field with mechanical trouble. They wouldn't get lost at the French coast line. They'll show up tomorrow."

I kept thinking about what Earl Doggett had told me. Could it be possible that he had a real premonition of what was coming?

We all went to the mess hall together. No one had much to say. There were only a few guys there. For some reason, we all wanted to eat together tonight. Even Dabbs was quiet. Everyone was thinking about Medcalf's crew. I wondered, "Are we here one minute, gone the next?"

We all walked on back to the hut. Everyone was making himself look busy. Some sat on the floor around the pot bellied stove. Van Bogelen and I sat on our bunks.

Wright and Buckey walked in. Wright said, "We are up for a mission tomorrow." Cook asked if he knew anything about Medcalf. Wright said he had heard nothing from other air fields where the two planes could have gone down. There were a few fields yet to report in to Wing Headquarters.

"It's beginning to look bad," Wright said.

Another night was spent lying on my cot, thinking about what Earl Doggett had said. I thought it had to be a lot of bunk: "No one knows when they are going to die. Or do they? Maybe Medcalf's crew will get back tomorrow." Then the thought of tomorrow's mission began to creep into my mind. The butterflies are always there when I heard "Mission tomorrow."

February 3 seemed to dawn before my eyes closed. The Jeep was in front of the hut with the sergeant waking us up. Mission today. It was 4:30 a.m.

Out of the sack. To the mess hall for fruit cocktail as usual. To the locker room and dress out. To briefing. It was all getting automatic, acting without thinking.

The target for today was Emden, Germany. Russelshein, Germany as our alternate target. The weather would not be good. Then that long "short walk" outside to the waiting trucks.

When we got out to the airplane, the ground crew was still loading bombs. We were supposed to have 4,000 pounds of incendiaries. The crew had only 3,000 pounds loaded. The front half of one bomb bay was still empty.

The flare went up at the tower. The mission was on. The tower told Wright to go with the load that he had, that there was no time to put the other 1,000 pounds on board. If we waited for a full load, it would make us late on takeoff. We would have to push to catch up with the formation. The load and balance had to be run again. The load change had changed the center of gravity on the airplane. With uneven loading, it is hard to trim and fly the airplane.

We were the last to take off because of waiting for instructions about the bomb loading. Finally, down the runway and lift off.

Wright caught up to the formation out over the ocean as they were ready to cross the enemy coast line. He pulled up into position in the formation. As we entered the coastal area, flak started coming up all around us. It looked like the flak gunners knew our exact altitude. Flak was bursting right inside our formation, almost at our wing tips.

If that wasn't enough trouble, clouds were closing in on us. In a few minutes we were in dense clouds at 15,000 feet. We couldn't even see our wing man. Wright had no idea where the other fifteen airplanes were that were with us. He could hear them on the radio, saying, "Keep the same speed and fly straight and level." I kept looking out the waist window for I had seen fifteen

airplanes out there beside us. Now I could sometimes see the wing of our left wing man. All the planes had been out there beside us just a minute ago.

Wright received a recall on the radio. I heard him ask, "How do I turn around in this stuff without hitting someone?" Wright began to make a very long, slow turn. We had no idea where we were or what was under or near us. Black puffs of flak began to burst in the clouds around us. Wright said, "We must be getting near the enemy coast line." He was right. We had climbed slowly to 15,000 feet and had made a long 360 degree turn. The clouds in front of us were breaking up.

There were a few airplanes in front of us at a lower altitude and some were coming out of the clouds behind us. We crossed the ocean and flew back into England. All fifteen airplanes were straggling back to base, one at a time. Cross and I put the safety wires back on the bombs and we landed. Back to debriefing we went, after five hours of flying and not dropping our bombs. The damned flak had put a hole in the left side of our ship by the waist window about the size of my hand.

We were all griping about the weather over Europe as we were going to debriefing. "What in the hell is wrong with the weather officer, sending us out in this kind of stuff?" I thought.

In debriefing, the officer said, "I don't think you men will get credit for this flight as a mission. When recalled, you should have just reached the enemy coast line." We all said, "You're wrong. You must be nuts. We had crossed the coast line and were being shot at."

"Well, the official answer will come later," the debriefing officer said.

While we were changing clothes in the locker room, the official answer came in. Wright brought it.

"They said we'll have to try again. This one won't count as a mission."

I had almost forgotten about Medcalf's crew. I asked Cross to walk with me to operations and see if they knew anything about what had happened to them. We all walked by the operations at the tower and asked. The officer there told us that Medcalf's plane had gone down in the ocean. The best that they had put together from the different crews that were flying with them was that Medcalf had gone down into a cloud layer on the way back from the target. He had never been seen again. "His plane just disappeared," the officer said. "He was still over water when he was last seen."

We all just stood there a minute and then walked out. Not one word was said. We walked on back to the hut together.

The blankets and covers were all rolled up on Medcalf's crew's side of the hut when we got back. All of their belongings were gone. It looked as though no one had ever been on that side of the hut. We all came in and went on our side of the hut and lay down on our bunks.

I don't think I could have said anything without crying. I had to wipe the tears from my eyes as I lay there. We were all feeling the effects of losing them. It was like losing a big part of our family all at once.

I got up and put some coal in the pot bellied stove. I lay back down, thinking, "Could it really be possible that Earl knew he was going to go down?"

The thing was over my head, but that was what had happened.

## Jimmy Stewart Kids Us

I had fallen asleep and slept all night on top of the covers on my cot with my clothes on. I awakened as cold as I could be. It was February 4. Tyler and I got some coal and built up the fire in the stove. When the hut warmed around the stove, everybody got up. Cook said we would have more room if we folded the cots on Medcalf's side of the hut and stacked them with their blankets.

We worked together and got all six of the cots in one pile. Now we had the whole hut to ourselves again. Medcalf's first engineer, who had missed that last flight when the plane was lost, had taken out all of his personal belongings the day before. We had not seen him or heard from him since.

After breakfast, we had a briefing to attend. When we arrived, the room was about half full. Major Stewart and several officers were sitting at the front of the room behind a table. The intelligence officer introduced us to a staff sergeant who had escaped from Germany. The sergeant told us a story of how he walked across France to freedom. Along the way, he bought German soldiers beer in a bar in Paris, France. He got on the wrong train several times and each time ended up back in Paris. He finally just walked from Paris to the Pyrenees Mountains. He climbed up into the mountains as far as he could. He lay down to die and soon

passed out. When he awakened, he was in a Spanish jail, covered with fleas and lice. The Spanish government turned him over to the Americans and now he was back in England. He was living proof that escape was possible. "You can make it back if you try hard enough," he said.

After the sergeant's talk, Jimmy Stewart thanked him. He looked at us and said, "Does anyone have a gripe after hearing this man's trouble?" One sergeant said, "Well, the mail is awful slow. I'm not getting any mail from home." Stewart said, "Sergeant, try writing more letters home. They might start answering them. Have you tried doing that?"

Dabbs had a gripe that was eating him up. He said, "Major Stewart, the ground crews have started eating in our flight crews' mess hall."

Stewart rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "My God, sergeant. Do you mean to stand there and tell me . . . Do you mean to tell me that someone in this organization really sneaks in our mess hall to eat that stuff?"

Everyone started laughing. Stewart smiled a little and sat back down without saying anything else.

The intelligence officer rose and briefed us on the use of escape kits and the need for new passports. He said pictures of us in civilian clothing would be taken in the next couple of days. He wanted us to have a two-day growth of beard on our face. "It will make you look more like a Frenchman," he said.

After several other escape methods and options were described, we were dismissed.

The next few days were spent cleaning up our hut and painting a cross, about eight inches tall, on one end of the hut, in memory of Medcalf's crew. Over the door on the other end of the hut, I drew a big Eighth Air Force patch. Then Cross painted it. Dabbs got mad at Cross. Dabbs said he wanted to paint some on the patch. Cross got mad and said, "Well, here. Take the damn brush and paint some. Just mess it all up." Dabbs took the brush and painted for a while and then put the brush down. Later, Cross fixed up what Dabbs had messed up.

We were all getting touchy, frequently complaining to each other. On February 5, we all had our new escape kit pictures made to go in our bogus French passports. We all looked pretty tough in those civilian clothes and a couple of days' growth of beard.

Two nights later, Cross asked me to cut his hair. "Then I'll cut yours," he said. About every two weeks, we tried to cut each

other's hair. We were getting pretty good at it. At least it kept the hair above our ears.

The weather was beginning to look pretty good. I thought, "We might start flying sometime soon again. Maybe, one of these days, we will complete another mission."

That night, we were told that we were scheduled to fly tomorrow. Here came my butterflies. The next morning found me back in briefing, waiting for Wright to show up. He had been late to all the briefings lately.

The target was Watten, France. It was just inside the French coast. Maybe it would be just a milk run.

Then I thought of Earl and Medcalf's crew and what happened on their milk run.

When we arrived at the airplane, the ground crew was still loading our bombs. We were to carry 8,000 pounds of 2,000-pound block busters. The ground crew had loaded two of them into the front of the bomb bay and had to go back to get two more.

While we waited, the flare from the tower went up. The mission was on. We were supposed to be the fourth plane to take off but we were still waiting when the twenty-first airplane took off. The tower told Wright he couldn't wait any longer. They told him to take off with what bombs he had on board.

We were going to have a hard time to catch up with the formation now. Wright taxied out and took off with the light load. We didn't use too much runway and were soon looking around the sky for the formation.

When Wright finally found it, someone had taken our position. Wright had to take the "tail end Charley" position. This was the lonely, exposed end of the formation that could put up the least defensive firepower against fighter attacks. The right side's last wing man. As we crossed the English Channel and the French coast, all hell broke loose. It looked like the flak guns were waiting for us. Flak just started bursting everywhere you looked inside the formation. The steel was whizzing back at us and hitting our ship.

The target was only twenty miles inside France and I could see the English coast out at 9 o'clock when we dropped our bombs on the target. The ground looked like nothing but bomb craters, every inch of it. Not one inch of ground had escaped getting hit at least once. Maybe the big bombs we dropped would open up whatever the Germans had installed underground.

Flak bursts were bouncing the airplane around. Metal fragments were slapping the sides of the bomber. There were holes

opening up on each side of the waist like someone was hitting the plane with an axe blade. The cordite smell was strong.

Large amounts of black smoke started coming from the cowl flap on number one engine, and around the supercharger. There was a big flash of fire. I called out, "Feather number one engine. Feather number one engine." Buckey said, "Number one engine oil pressure is dropping." Again I said, "Feather number one engine. Feather number one engine. We have a fire. We have a fire."

I dropped off my flak suit and buckled on my chest parachute. I was still watching number one engine. The prop came to a stand still in the feathered position.

Wright said, "How bad is it?" Tyler, looking over my shoulder, said, "Bad enough." I said, "Not bad enough to leave the ship yet. The fire seems to be smothering out since the prop stopped turning." It looked like it was being smothered by the oil that was shooting out from the cowl flaps. The supercharger was cooling off. Fire stopped coming from it. "Only black smoke is coming out of the supercharger now," I said.

I could see England across the channel. There was only light cloud coverage. We were now a long way below and behind the formation. We were losing them. "This is getting to be a habit," I thought.

We were on our own. We had seen no fighter protection and no enemy fighters. I thought there was just too much flak for fighters to get near us.

Wright asked, "How does it look, Robbie?" I said, "I don't see any flames now. Everything is still together. Lots of black smoke and raw oil over the top and bottom of the engine, mostly coming from the top." We were now flying on three engines. The channel was under us and Wright had turned straight for England.

The chalky white cliffs were in front of us. Wright said, "What will it be? Do you guys want to sit down at the first airfield we come to, or try to make it back to our own base? I had rather be sleeping on my bunk tonight than at some strange base." Everyone wanted to try for home. Wright said, "I think the plane will make it back if everything stays like it is right now."

We had seen no enemy fighters. We limped along on three engines. Number one kept smoking.

Wright spotted our airfield, called the tower and went straight in and landed. Trucks followed us until we stopped at the end of the runway. Black smoke was still coming from the engine. Oil was everywhere. Someone on the ground hit the front of

number one engine with a fire extinguisher. Wright cut all the engines. Bullet Serenade had brought us home again.

We all got out and looked at the airplane. There was a bunch of holes in it. The flak had been thick. A piece had come through the front window and hit Buckey's steel helmet which he had been wearing. He had said nothing about it.

Cross said, "They must be trying to get us killed. This was supposed to be a milk run." We had been in the air three hours and thirty minutes.

Cook said we ran into so much flak that he didn't even know it when a shell came through his top turret Plexiglas.

A piece of shrapnel had ruptured a rocker arm push rod cover on number one engine. Oil had squirted out and covered the engine and blew back on the supercharger which set the oil on fire. The oil was being ignited as it was leaving the wing and engine nacelle. This was the explanation of why the fire kept blowing out. When the engine was feathered, the supercharger cooled down and the exhaust quit supporting the fire.

It seemed a miracle that the plane had not taken more damage or that the fuel vents or gas tanks had not been set on fire.

Only seventeen of the twenty-two ships had made it to the target. Five had turned back before they got to it. All had returned.

Our plane had been the last to take off and the last to get back to the base. Wright complained about not having a full load of bombs waiting for us. "We are not going to be held up again on takeoff," he said. "This is the second time it has happened."

We all got back to the hut as soon as possible after debriefing. I was exhausted. Watching the engine fire had taken a lot out of me. As soon as I got to the hut, I threw myself on the bunk and went to sleep.

I woke up the next morning, still lying on top of my bunk with my clothes still on.

There were letters from Elizabeth waiting for me at the mail room. In one, she sent several copies of a small article that had appeared in the morning paper at home. It read, "Staff Sergeant John H. Robinson has been awarded the Air Medal at a Liberator Bomber Division in England. He is waist gunner on a B-24. His wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Robinson, lives at 158 Marne street and his mother, Mrs. Paul V. Willis, at 1136 Poplar."

I thought, "The Air Force sure gets the news around." I also learned through that newspaper clipping that my aunt's name was now Mrs. Paul V. Willis, whom the reporter had identified as my

mother. When I left Memphis, her name had been Mrs. J. A. Watson. Apparently, my aunt had married again, for the third time. She had raised me as if I were her son.

## My Angel Buys a Home For Us

Another bit of news from home: Elizabeth wrote that she had saved some money and was buying the home that we had been renting from my aunt. This was a real surprise.

Elizabeth and I now had a house of our own. Elizabeth wrote that my aunt needed money and was happy to sell the house and two lots to her. Elizabeth said she now understood why I liked living there so much. She talked about the memories we had of the short time we were together there. I was very happy that Elizabeth was able to work out a business arrangement with my aunt. This was a side of Elizabeth that I had not known before. I could only think, "Elizabeth you are wonderful." I was so happy and glad.

I sat on the bunk and wrote her: My Dear Wife, I love you so very much. I don't know how you managed to get my aunt to sell the property to us. It is wonderful to know that we have a home of our own.

As I wrote the letter, I was so happy that I could hardly keep back the tears from my eyes.

I thumbed through the old letters that I had received from Elizabeth. Among them was the letter from the hula dancer I had met in Miami.

I got out another piece of paper and wrote the hula dancer a letter, saying it had been very nice to walk around the base with her after she had danced in the show at Morrison Field. I said I had enjoyed talking to her while she waited for her bus to arrive. I attached a copy of the newspaper clipping to the letter. I knew what she would think when she got to the part that said, "His wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Robinson, lives at 158 Marne Street."

Maybe this would end it.

Elizabeth's letter sure was a boost to my morale. I had been feeling so depressed and sorry for myself. I was now walking on air, thinking about Elizabeth and how we owned a home. This day had turned out to be wonderful. "I love you Elizabeth, so much," I kept saying.

As darkness settled over the field, the sirens came on as usual for the nightly German air raids. Cross, Cook, Tyler and I sat outside the hut, watching the searchlights and listening to the flak guns in the distance. Once in a while the searchlights would pinpoint a German bomber and would follow it. In the distance, you would hear bomb explosions and see the glow of fires in several directions.

In the middle of the air raid, Dabbs came walking up to the hut with a large keg of beer on his shoulder. Dabbs took it into the hut and set it on the pile of empty cots, on the side of the hut where Medcalf's crew once had lived. He unrolled one of their blankets and covered the keg with it.

Dabbs came back outside. He said, "Now, we have our own keg of black beer if anyone wants some."

Dabbs and Cook were the only ones on the enlisted crew who drank beer. The keg just sat there, but Dabbs made several trips to it with his canteen cup in his hand. I thought, "Well, Dabbs will be staying around the hut now, at least while the beer lasts."

I asked Dabbs. "Where in the world did you get the beer?"

Dabbs said, "It just fell in my arms."

With Dabbs, you just never knew.

On the evening of February 10, Wright came to the hut. He said there was another mission tomorrow. Dabbs handed him a canteen cup. "Like some beer?" He nodded at the keg.

Wright walked over to the keg, opened the spout and filled the cup to the brim. Wright drank some and said, "There is no need of me asking you anything about it. Keep the blanket over it." He drank the beer and said, "I'll see you in the morning."

The butterflies started flying around inside my stomach, even though this would be my ninth mission. I sat down and wrote a letter to Elizabeth. It helped.

The Germans were up and at it again. The air raid siren seemed to be making more noise than usual. The air raid warnings were lasting longer and coming later in the night. They didn't calm the butterflies at all. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep.

Before I knew it, I could hear the Jeep coming. The damned thing would stop and start until it was in front of our hut. The call was always, "Wake up. Mission today. Good luck."

Again through the mud to the mess hall. The fruit cocktail was the salvation of my stomach. Then dress out in flight clothes and to the briefing room.

In the briefing room the curtains were drawn away from the chart. The flight path on the chart didn't look too bad. The target for the day was to be Bonnissier, France on the rocket coast. I had been there before on my "volunteer" Christmas Eve mission. The target was the rocket emplacements and something called "buzz bombs" which the Germans used against London. The launching sights for these "buzz bombs" must be destroyed before they could be used, Jimmy Stewart had told us.

This should be an easy "milk run" if they had no more anti-aircraft guns over the target than they had on Christmas Eve.

The bomb load was 6,000 pounds of 500-pound general purpose bombs. After briefing, we arrived at the hard stand. We had to fly plane number 562. Bullet Serenade was still in the hangar being repaired.

The flare went up from the tower. The mission was on. Wright taxied out on the ramp and got in line. There would be twenty-three aircraft to take off. We were to fly lead in the second group of planes. The airplanes moved up, one by one, to the runway. The weather was not fit for ducks to fly in. We could see half way down the runway today. Down the runway with full engine power. Lift off and into the air. The wheels came up and locked in place with a bump. We soon broke out of the ground fog cover and into a clearing in the sky. The flaps came up and Wright headed for the formation at 8,000 feet. The English Channel was now under us. Everyone test fired their guns and Cross pulled the arming wires on the bombs.

The formation was about ready to enter the French mainland. No one had seen any fighter protection.

As flak began to burst in front of us, I thought about the piece I read in the Limey newspaper about the amazing military theory that a heavily armed bomber, such as ours, didn't need outside protection. According to this theory, that an Italian general had come up with, we had enough guns on board to drive off any fighter planes and enough lift to climb well above all the enemy flak! "Where do they get these ideas?" I thought, as we crossed the French coast line at 15,000 feet. Flak was everywhere, all at once, all around us. It was bursting in the front flight formation and filtering back to us. I was beginning to think, "We will never make it through this."

Wright called out on the intercom, "We are going into a cloud bank. Watch the other ships in the formation. If any get too close, call out."

Well, the bombers couldn't be much closer to each other. Our left wing man's wing was right beside our left tail. Cloud wisps began passing between their right wing and our tail. Then I could no longer see the other plane at all.

Wright said, "We are not going to find our target in this damned stuff."

Flak bursts were big black clouds puffing out in the white cloud banks. I wondered, "How can the Germans put the flak near us, up here in the clouds?"

Wright said, "We are going back." He started making a long wide turn to the left. We broke out into a clearing at the French coast line. Our wing men were still with us on both sides. More ships came out of the clouds behind us, still in good spacing. The lead top front flight broke out ahead of us some distance away. Wright said, "They changed their speed in the cloud bank." That was a deadly thing to do. Wright had maintained the same speed and altitude. Everyone was behind us in good spacing. Wright pulled up to the lead flight. He told Wittman to drop the bombs in the channel along the coast line. The bomb bay doors went open and the airplane jumped up with the loss of the bomb load.

I watched the bombs as they fell. They made a splash pattern in the water as they hit. Everyone behind us was doing the same thing with their bombs.

I started looking around the waist of the airplane. There were flak holes on both sides of the waist by the windows. The right tail section had some tears in the skin.

One thing I knew for sure was that the Germans had moved the flak guns around on the French coast since Christmas Eve. I didn't know where they had found so many guns. It wasn't a milk run. It was almost as bad as a mission to Bremen.

We had taken off at 7:48 a.m. We sat down on the runway at Tibenham at 12:24 p.m. We had been in the air nearly five hours. The flak had been so heavy that no one could say or do anything but stare at it. Leaving the hard stand, we all looked back at flak holes and tears in the airplane. Wright, as usual, didn't have anything to say except, "Damn." Buckley tried to smile. "Those Germans almost had our number."

No one tried to count the holes. We were just glad to be back at base in one piece.

At debriefing we learned that only one of our twenty-three bombers had dropped its bomb load at the target area. The rest dropped their bombs in the ocean. Incredibly, the debriefing officer

said he didn't know if we would get credit for this mission. He said he would notify us later.

I thought, "We get the devil shot out of us and the plane torn up and you are not going to count it as a mission?"

We were all down in the dumps. Back in the flight locker room, everything went wrong, trying to get out of our flight clothes and get dressed. The thing was getting to me.

Tyler watched me fumble, "Don't you know how to undress by now?" I snapped back at him, "None of your damned business."

Tyler walked on out of the locker room. I was the last to leave. As I walked alone back to the mess hall and then to the hut, I had the feeling that I was all alone in this. It seemed that no one or nothing was ever going to make things go right again.

I told myself, "Get hold of yourself." I was actually shaking inside and out. I could still hear the flak bursting around me. *Krup! Krup!* I was talking to myself. Then I thought, "God, please help me."

I knew I must be losing my mind to be talking aloud to myself like this.

I realized I was back at the front door of the hut and reaching for the door knob. "God, please help me," I said, over and over. I went into the hut and flopped on my bunk, totally exhausted.

I was scared as hell.

## Jimmy Stewart Chews Out My Crew

The morning of February 13 we were back in the flight locker room, dressing out to make another mission. Then to the briefing room to find out what the target was. Again it was Bonnissier on the French coast.

I looked around the briefing room. We had no pilot again. Wright was now showing up late for every briefing. When he finally walked into the room, long after briefing had started, he tried to get in a seat as quietly possible.

Major Jimmy Stewart saw Wright come in. He watched him ease along to an empty seat. Then he rose and stopped the briefing.

He gave Wright a real verbal tongue lashing. In front of everyone. He was mad. I had never seen this side of Jimmy Stewart before. With no words to spare, Stewart told Wright what the responsibilities of a pilot and an officer were. One of them was

not to be late to a briefing for a mission of such importance. Wright, being short in stature, sank down even lower in his chair until you could barely see him.

Stewart went on with the tongue lashing. After he was through with Wright, he addressed himself to everyone in the room.

I thought, "Maybe this combat thing is getting to Jimmy Stewart, too. It's not just me."

When we reached the hard stand, Bullet Serenade was there, ready to go. The old girl looked good with her patches and repairs. Some of her patches were still silver and hadn't been painted yet. It made us feel better.

We were in the airplane, waiting for the flare to go up from the tower, when a Jeep drove up to the ship. An operations officer got out and motioned for Wright to cut all engines. Wright shut them down and we all jumped out of the airplane, wondering what was going on.

The operations officer waited for us to gather around him and then he said, "I think it will be best today if we let the crew take five days off to rest. You don't have to, but it has been recommended by operations."

I didn't really think that our fatigue was showing that much or looked that bad.

Cross said, "Man, we are all dressed out to go. Why didn't this come earlier?" Wright asked each of us, "What do you want to do?"

I expressed myself first. I said, "We can go on a mission any time but we can't go on a furlough any time. I think we had better take it while they are offering it to us." Cook said, "What have we got to lose?" After a little discussion, everyone agreed that we would take the furlough.

About that time, another crew rode up in a truck and took our place aboard our plane, Bullet Serenade. With the other crew arriving when they did, I began to feel we really didn't have a choice about taking the furlough. Someone had already decided it for us and the officer was just being nice about it. After we got out of our flight clothes, we all went by operations to pick up the furlough orders.

I wanted to ask who had decided that our crew should take some time off, but I didn't.

The medical and operations officers were there. They gave us the orders. The medical officer gave us the location and address

of a Rest and Recreational Home and he recommended that we go there for the next seven days.

Back at the hut, we all dressed out in our Sunday best. I put enough underwear and toilet articles in my bag for a week.

We all walked to the train station to take the next train to Leicester. During a long wait, I read an English newspaper. While Cross and I were walking around in the train station, I saw a sign on one train that said Nottingham.

I told Cross, "Hey, I have some distant relatives in Nottingham. My father was born there. My brother, Odes, told me about them once."

My brother lived in West Virginia and was the keeper of the family records.

"You can go on to the rest home," I told Cross. "I think I'll go to Nottingham and try to find my cousin. I've got her name in my little note book. Connie Stephenson, Nottingham, England."

"Is that all the address you have to go on?" Cross asked.

"That's all," I said.

"Don't you think you should go to the rest home? I think you need it."

I said, "What can they do for me at a rest home that's better for me than doing something I want to do? Look, if I don't find Connie Stephenson and her family, I'll join you at the rest home."

I asked the conductor how I could get to Nottingham. He said, "At the next stop, you'll get off and change trains. Your train to Nottingham will come by within the next two hours."

When the train got to the station, the conductor tried to tell me what to do. I understood about half of what he said. The kind of English he spoke was like a foreign language to me.

At the station, I told Cross goodbye, got off and bought a ticket to Nottingham. As I was standing around in the station, waiting, an English girl started talking to me. When she found out that I wasn't going to London, she began to lose interest in our conversation. She did make the time pass quickly.

As the train to Nottingham arrived, I smiled at her. She was very companionable. I thought, "I don't know where I am going. I should go with her to London."

The thought entered my mind.

Something made me say goodbye. I stepped onto the train to Nottingham. I arrived in the early afternoon and began asking the English people who worked in the station if they knew of a Stephenson family. Oddly none of them seemed friendly to me.

I asked a ticket taker if he had ever heard of a Stephenson family. He told me, "Ask somebody what knows." I thought, "Hell! If I knew 'somebody what knows,' I wouldn't be asking you!"

Outside the train station, I was surprised to see that Nottingham was such a large city. I walked about a block and went into a barber shop. I asked if anyone knew a Stephenson family. The barber said, "Get on a bus called, Gordon Road Estates. I think there are a great many people called Stephenson around Kelham Green."

I found the bus and got on. The bus was a double decker. I went to the top deck so I could see where I was going. I asked the conductor if he knew any Stephenson families. He thought there were some in Kelham Green. I asked if he would let me off when we got to that area. After a long ride through the town and out into the suburbs, the conductor stopped the bus and said, "Yank, you may have some luck here."

I stepped off the bus, wondering which way to walk. I told myself, "This is one big wild goose chase. Before it gets too late in the day, I had better get on back to the train station." I walked on up the street, looking for a bus stop on the other side of the street that would take me back to the station.

As I was about to cross the street to the bus stop, a soft English voice came from behind me. "Are you Harold Robinson?"

I was so surprised when I turned and looked that I couldn't talk for a few seconds. There, walking behind me, was a grey haired lady in her early 40s, wearing the blue uniform of the Fire Service. She was very neat and trim.

Looking curiously at the lady, I said, "Yes. I'm Harold Robinson." The lady said, "I am Connie Stephenson."

I thought, "Could this be possible?" I couldn't believe what she was saying. The lady said, "I recognized you when you stepped off the bus. You look just like your father."

She walked up to me and hugged my neck. She kissed me on the cheek. "Oh, pardon me," she said, stepping back, a bit embarrassed. We talked as we walked on down the street together for about three blocks. I told her how I had come to Nottingham to try to find them. "I can't believe I just ran into you like this," I said, feeling amazed.

We turned onto Kelham Green. "We live at Number 2, Gordon Road Estates," she said. "Our daughter lives with us but all



Connie, me and Jean in Nottingham



USAF Photographic Collection  
Maintenance crew in 445th Bomb Group

our sons are away in the service. You must stay with us the night. We have an extra bedroom. You must stay."

Her home was a town house with a small front yard. She opened the door and we went in. She turned the light switch but no lights came on. She said that she had to put some pennies in the electric meter. It had run out. This was new to me. Behind the front door on the wall was an electric meter that took coins. Below it was a gas meter that took coins also. I saw what she was going to do so, from all the English coins that I had in my pocket, I filled up the electric meter. I still had some coins left so I put them all in the gas meter.

The home was very nice. Three bedrooms upstairs and a bathroom with a living room, dining area, and kitchen downstairs. The living room had a fireplace in it. There was a small, fenced back yard with a little vegetable garden in it. This house was very much like the home of the Home Guard major whom I had met in Norwich.

Connie talked about my brother Odes who had kept in touch with her by mail through the years. Her sons were in the English Navy. Her daughter was in her thirties and worked for the English Health Research Service. Her husband worked with her in the Fire Service. She seemed so pleased to know a Yank, and was very sweet to me. Connie tried to make me feel at home. She tried to make me feel like a part of her family.

She asked what I would like to eat. She had to start preparing a meal for her husband and daughter who would be home soon. She opened her food closet and I could see there were only a few cans of food. I suggested that I take the family out some place to eat. Connie said, "I wouldn't hear of it." I asked, "Is there a grocery store nearby? I need to buy a few things." Connie said, "There are several shops near here."

Each shop carried only one or two items. One sold green vegetables. One sold fish. Another sold canned goods. Except for vegetables, you had to have ration coupons for everything you bought. I talked to the shop keeper alone and offered about three times what he was asking and he sold me whatever I wanted, without any coupons. We filled Connie's baskets and returned to her home to fix supper.

Connie's husband soon arrived and was very surprised to see me. He was a very nice person and very likeable. He made me feel right at home. Connie's daughter, Jean, arrived shortly after. She was a very poised and proper English girl and very pleasant.

She was almost six feet tall. The whole family spoke perfect King's English. They, on the other hand, thought I talked funny. The dinner and evening were a wonderful change for me. It was marvelous to be in a home where people made you feel so welcome.

Connie woke me up the next morning. It had been a wonderful night's sleep in a good soft bed. She had breakfast ready. She served me a real egg and some sausage with toast and hot tea. After breakfast, everyone went to work and left me with the house. I spent the morning walking around the neighborhood and visiting the little shops. Some of the shopkeepers looked at me as if I were a thief. There weren't many Yanks in this area, and they were suspicious of me.

Everyone arrived back home early and we sat and talked in front of the fireplace, drinking tea all evening until late in the night. They wanted to know all about America and where I came from. I was eager to talk about home and the Robinson family, and my wife, back in the good old USA.

The seven days of furlough passed quickly. We had been drawn close together. I had found a family in England. Finding a family here in England was like finding a light at the end of a dark tunnel.

At last, it was time to return to the train station and go back to the base in Tibenham. Everyone went down to the train station with me to say goodbye.

Some of the crew were already back at the base when I got there.

I was feeling pretty good, like a human being again. Cook was sitting on his bunk. He seemed down in the dumps. I asked him, "Didn't you have a good time at the Rest and Recreational home?" He said, "Yes, but we don't have Bullet Serenade any more." "We don't what?" I said. "Bullet Serenade went down on a mission with another crew while we were gone," Cook said. "It went down in flames."

"Our airplane?" I said. He nodded. "Who was flying her?" I asked. Cross didn't know.

The bottom dropped out again. I felt empty, like I had lost everything.

When all the crew got back that night and heard the news, it seemed to open all the old wounds. It brought back the hurts that the furlough had healed for us.

I lay awake that night, thinking about Bullet Serenade, the big lady who had taken care of us. We named and petted her. She

had been so much a part of us. Now she was gone forever. We all walked over to operations to find out more about her last mission. We were told that the ship caught on fire. She had stayed in the formation a long time and then dropped out and went down and blew up. It happened on the way back from the target.

## Jimmy Stewart Has a Beer With Us

Walking back to the hut, all we talked about was losing our lucky plane, Bullet Serenade. It was like losing one of the family. Back at the hut, I drew a tombstone by the cross that I had drawn on the wall for Medcalf's crew and put Bullet Serenade's name on it. Cross painted it in colors as he had Medcalf's cross. "What's coming next?" I wondered.

The next afternoon, Wright and Wittman came by the hut. Wright said, "We fly tomorrow." We all went to the mess hall together. The thought of flying a mission tomorrow didn't seem to bother me as much as losing our airplane.

After mess we were all lying around in the hut. I was writing a letter to Elizabeth and reading some from her that had come in today.

In walked Jimmy Stewart.

Dabbs called out, "Attention."

"At ease, fellows," said Major Stewart before I could get up out of my bunk. He walked up to the pot bellied stove and started warming his hands and his back side. It was cold and raw outside. "Lieutenant Wright's crew has always got a good hot stove," Stewart said. "It's kind of bigger than some of the others."

We waited.

Stewart's eyes drifted around the hut. He strolled over to the pile of cots. He picked up the edge of one of the blankets. He carefully laid it back from the beer keg it had been covering. He turned and walked back across to my bunk. He took my canteen from the shelf above my bunk and carefully pulled the metal cup from the bottom of it. He put the rest of the canteen back on the shelf and walked back to the beer keg. He had not said a word since he uncovered the keg. He opened the spigot on the keg and filled my canteen cup with the beer that Dabbs had stolen from somewhere.



"Now, ah, fellows . . . someone stole a keg of beer."

He stepped back over to the end of my bunk and sat down with a sigh. He drank the beer slowly, continuing to warm himself by the stove. Stewart just sat there, taking his time drinking the beer and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

He looked at me and said, "Well, this black English beer is pretty good - if you can't get anything else. Right?" I smiled. We all were silent. He got up and filled my canteen cup again and stepped back and sat down on my bunk.

He continued to slowly sip the beer and warm himself at the stove. He wasn't rushing. He was taking his time. He obviously was enjoying that second cup.

After a while, he said quietly, "Fellows, someone stole a keg of beer from the officers club a few days ago." He looked around. "Ah - you guys hear anything about that?" We shook our heads. We said we hadn't heard anything about it. Stewart shook the last drop of dark beer out of my empty cup that he had been drinking from. "I thought not," he said. He wiped the lip of it with his hand. Then he put the cup back on my canteen and carefully placed it where he got it, on the shelf over my bunk.

He walked over to the beer keg and pulled the Medcalf crew blanket back over it. He tucked the blanket around the keg carefully. You couldn't see the keg in the pile of blankets anymore.

Stewart came back to the stove. He stood rubbing his hands together over the little pot bellied stove. "Sure a nice sized stove."

Stewart cleared his throat and said, "I know that Lieutenant Wright's crew doesn't know anything about this. I'm certain they didn't have a thing to do with stealing a keg of beer."

He turned, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He zipped up his jacket and walked out of the front door without saying another word.

Stewart had been there for some time. We were all speechless, wondering what he was going to do when he finished his beer.

Dabbs said, "Whuuuu! I didn't know what was going to happen. Why didn't someone say something?" I sat there shaking my head. "What could we say?" We all thought it was funny but nobody was laughing. Stewart had made his point well. Dabbs sure wouldn't steal another keg of beer.

The Jeep stopped outside our hut in the early morning darkness of February 22. The sergeant opened the door of the hut and came in and woke each of us up. The tone of his voice still

sounded apologetic about having to get us up for a mission. I got the feeling that he thought he was sending us to be executed.

We were all up quickly, as though we wanted to get it over with. I built a fire in the stove, dressed, and cleaned up. I had shaved the night before. Then I went to the mess hall. Fruit cocktail seemed to help the butterflies in my stomach a little. Then to the flight locker room to dress out in flight clothes and go on to briefing.

One of the briefing officers pulled the curtain back from the wall chart. This time it looked like we would tour all of Europe. The target for today would be Gotha, Germany.

Wright came in after briefing had started. He looked like he was still in bed. The weather briefing officer said the weather would be poor over the target but we should be able to bomb the target.

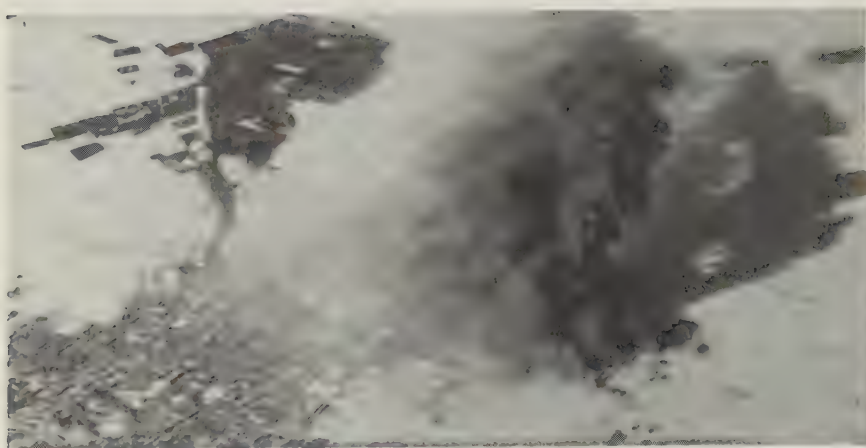
When we arrived at the hard stand, aircraft Number 666 was in Bullet Serenade's place. Our lady didn't exist any longer, except in ashes and black twisted metal framework somewhere. We put everything on board. Our bomb load was 6,000 pounds of 120-pound fragmentation bombs.

The tower flare went up. Wright taxied out and got in line. We turned down the runway and lifted off. As we were moving into formation, we passed through large banks of clouds. Then out over the English Channel, climbing up to our altitude. We test fired our weapons. Cross removed the arming wires from the bombs.

As we reached the French coast, spotty flak began coming up at us. It began to burst all around us. Our fighter protection, P-47s and P-51s, were now turning back toward England, their fuel running low. First, the P-47s left and then the P-51s. As the P-51s were leaving, the German Me 109s began coming in from 11 o'clock. They began to split up and come in from every direction, like a swarm of flies. It was hard to pick one out to shoot at. I was just shooting. The Me 109s were not picking out any particular airplane. They would just fly through the formation, shooting as they went. They were going under, over, and on each side of us. I only had a few seconds to shoot at any one of them. I would get in several bursts and then another would be in its place.

We had started out with twenty-seven aircraft with us in the formation. Dabbs counted and said, "It looks like they are all still with us." Tyler said, "Hey! Here come some P-51s from 5 o'clock!"

The German fighters broke off and headed for the clouds.



USAF Photographic Collection  
Gotha being smashed.



USAF Photographic Collection  
Destruction of Kiel.

Flak was now beginning to come through the cloud layer below us, and burst in front of the formation. Black puffs in the clouds were coming up in front of us. Steel fragments were whizzing out of them in all directions.

A mass of clouds went up in the sky as far up as you could see. It made a solid white wall in front of us. We were almost on the edge of the city of Gotha.

"We should be over our Initial Point but the ships in front of us haven't opened their bomb bay doors," Wright said. "We open ours when they do."

I sat down on the ammunition box. After a few seconds, smoke began coming out of the left sleeve of my coat. I felt a hot spot under my left arm pit. I pulled off the heated glove on my right hand. I thought, "It's forty below zero. Can't keep this glove off more than a few seconds." My right hand still had the thin white silk glove on it. I dropped my flak suit on the floor and opened my heavy coat. I felt inside for the hot spot under my left arm pit.

I pushed burning cloth away from my body. My right hand was beginning to feel cold. The white glove had black smears on it from the burn spot inside the heated suit. I pulled off the white silk glove and reached under my arm pit. I felt some heating wires that were broken. I twisted them together. I could feel warmth coming back to my left sleeve.

I put everything back on: the white silk glove, the heated mitten, and the heavy glove. I tried not to move my left arm at my shoulder so I wouldn't pull the wires loose that I had twisted together. Tyler helped me back into my flak suit and buckled the snaps for me. I was now feeling heat all over my body. Boy! It sure would have been cold if the heated suit had failed and not gone back to heating.

As we were getting closer to the cloud bank, the flak was getting heavy. Wright came on the intercom and said, "We are getting a recall. We are being recalled when we are almost over the target. For God's sake, we should drop some bombs!" A minute later, he said, "We are being told not to drop our bombs!" As we turned from the cloud bank and the flak area, I could see two aircraft behind us dropping bombs. I told Wright. After a long moment, he said, "Well. They were told not to drop."

Wittman called out, "Eleven o'clock. Fighters. Me 109s coming in!" The Me 109s made several fly-throughs with everyone shooting at them. Then they left as quickly as they came.

While I was firing my gun at the attacking fighters, I was keeping my left arm close to my body to keep from pulling the heating wires apart that I had twisted together. I sure didn't want to freeze in this forty-below temperature.

To our left, a flight of B-24s were dropping their bombs through a small cloud clearing on a field below. I reported to Wright. Buckey came on the intercom. "We have been ordered to drop in the channel," he said. I answered, "What a waste of effort." Wright said, "It won't be a waste. We will drop near the coast line and maybe hit some of the mines they have buried. We might even hit some other German defenses."

Dabbs called out, "Fighters coming in at six o'clock." One lone Me 109 flew through the complete formation, from rear to front, just feet from all the airplanes. He was firing all the way through. He was such a surprise, doing what he did, that no one really got a shot at him. The Me 109 came a few feet from our right waist window and turned down - straight down - for the cloud cover below.

The coast line was now becoming visible. The cloud cover seemed to stop at the enemy coast line. As we flew across the coast and over the channel, Buckey opened the bomb bay doors and called, "Bombs away." We dropped 6,000 pounds of fragmentation bombs in the channel. The ships behind us were now dropping. The coast line was getting a good bombing for what it was worth. I thought it was such a wasted effort.

Wright soon had the airplane back at the airfield. We peeled off from the formation, flew the pattern and landed. We had brought back a few holes in the waist section on each side of the ship. The ground crew would have some patching to do. I told the ground crew chief, "We don't want you to forget how to patch. So we brought you a few more holes to work on." When we got to debriefing we were all griping about being recalled, just when we got to the target. Even with the cloud bank in front of us, we could have dropped our bombs. The debriefing officer said, "I'll make a note of it."

After I put up my flight gear in the locker room, I took my heated suit to the quartermaster to get a replacement. The sergeant told me they didn't have a single replacement. He said, "It looks like all the heated suits are breaking down. Maybe some new ones will come in soon." He said they had been fixing them by using a bobby pin to hold the wires together. He gave me a hand full of

bobby pins. "You can slip one of these over the broken wires or use one to jump the plugs out with."

I went back to the hut and reworked the wiring in the heated suit. I made sure that the wires wouldn't come apart. Then I slipped a bobby pin across the wires to hold them. I thought, "A bobby pin to keep you from freezing to death! What next?" I took several bobby pins to the locker room and put them on my sleeve so I would have them if I ever needed one in flight for a quick repair. "Rescued by bobby pins," I thought.

While I was at the quartermaster's, the sergeant told me that, on takeoff that morning, one of our airplanes accidentally lost some of its load of fragmentation bombs through its bomb bay. The frags had fallen into a hut and killed two men and wounded six others. Some of the bombs fell in an English farm house near the field and killed the farmer's wife as she was cooking her husband's breakfast in the kitchen. I thought, "It's not safe anywhere anymore." I walked on to the mess hall, thinking about the mission and how easy it was to get killed around here.

After trying to eat, we all came back to the hut. Everyone had heard about bombs dropping on the base from one of our own airplanes. No one wanted to talk about it - or anything else. We had put in six hours and forty-five minutes of flying inside hell today. I made a few notes in my diary and then lay down on top of my bunk. I lay there staring at the ceiling for some time and then sleep overcame me.

## A Surprise Meeting

The next thing I knew, Cross was trying to wake me up. "You have a visitor," he said. I sat up, rubbing my eyes. Standing beside him, of all people, was Henry Parkhurst.

He was the guy who had left gunnery school before he finished. I had always wondered what happened to him.

Parkhurst put his arms around me and said, "Old buddy, I have been worried about you."

He told me that he washed out of gunnery school and was sent to Memphis, Tennessee to outfit B-24s for overseas use. Then he was transferred to the 701st as a ground crew mechanic. He had seen the flight roster with my name on it several times and had been looking for me.

It was nice to see him again but I was really too fatigued to talk to anyone. He said, "Old buddy, you get some sleep and I will come back to see you tomorrow." Then he left. This was the first person I had seen whom I had trained with. Here he was in the very same group with me.

It was some time before I went back to sleep. I hadn't taken my clothes off before I had fallen asleep. I took them off and got under the ten blankets and went back to sleep. My tenth mission had taken a lot out of me and the rest of the crew. No one was interested in doing anything but sleeping.

The next morning, I had a nice visit with Henry Parkhurst. We talked about old times at gunnery school. He said he had been very concerned about me being on a flight crew. It was nice of him but it was not something I wanted to hear or even think about now. Parkhurst said he was getting a pretty good picture of how things were going, being on a ground crew and having to patch up the airplanes that were damaged. "Our planes are coming back more damaged then ever now," he said. I said, "Maybe that's good. At least they are coming back." He said, "Old buddy, you don't get the picture."

Parkhurst said they were having a hard time getting parts and keeping the airplanes able to run and fly. He had been working twelve and fifteen hours, day and night. Sometimes as much as two days in a row without a wink of sleep. I knew there was lots of patching and repair work going on. I had great respect for the way the ground crews had been repairing and keeping the airplanes flying. They were really keeping them in good shape after all the battle damage they were getting.

Parkhurst walked around the base with me. He showed me where he was staying, the hangar and the airplanes he had been working on. He talked about them as if they were his children that he was taking care of. After I saw some of the damage at close hand, I knew it really did take a superhuman effort to keep the aircraft flying.

Parkhurst went with me to the flight crew mess hall and had dinner with me. "Boy! You fellows sure do eat better than we do," he said. This was the first time that I realized that our food was any different. We were having more vegetables and meat and more fruit than the ground crews had been getting. I was wondering why the ground crew was always trying to get into the flight crew mess hall while I had been complaining about the food.

The flight officers ate the same food we did. They just came in a separate door, went down the other side of our serving line, and ate on their side of the mess hall.

Parkhurst was saying the ground crew was getting more fatty foods than the flight crews. I spent the full day with Henry Parkhurst, and then returned to my hut.

## Falling Three Miles

Wright was there when I returned to the hut. He said that we would fly again tomorrow, the 24th. This news always gave me a sinking feeling. I asked, "What is the target?" Wright said, "I don't know. We are just on alert." He left and we started to get card games going on both ends of the hut. Poker on one side of the pot bellied stove and Black Jack on the other side. We played for a while and everyone started getting cross with each other. The poker game was about to turn into a free for all fight.

Cross and I gave up the Black Jack game with all the noise coming from the poker game. We couldn't concentrate. They soon stopped playing and went to bed. Feelings were getting out of hand.

I lay in the bunk, reading some in my little Bible. I reached up on the shelf and got Elizabeth's picture and kissed it and put it back on the shelf and pulled the blankets around me.

The next thing I heard was the Jeep. I was up and building a fire in the little stove before the sergeant came through the door. The cold didn't seem to be bothering me as much as it used to. Maybe I couldn't tell the difference between shaking from raw fear and shaking from the raw cold. They both made you shake the same way.

"This will be my eleventh mission if I complete it," I thought. Off to the mess hall. In the flight locker room, I was very careful how I handled my heated suit. Then to briefing.

The curtain was already open when I got there. My God! The target was Gotha, again. There would be twenty-five aircraft sent out. The weather was going to be good. The target would be clear, according the weather man. We had a good briefing but I was getting to doubt the weather man. I hoped it would not be a repeat of the last mission to Gotha.

We arrived at the hard stand in the truck. Number 666 was waiting. We loaded up and everything was going good. Down the runway and lift off. Perfect. We carried 5,000 pounds of 500-pound general purpose bombs. This mission was going to be letter perfect because we had rehearsed it on February 22. Wright got into formation. We would be the left wing man of the second flight today.

The weather was good, just as the weather man had said it would be. The enemy coast line was now coming up in front of us. Our altitude was 23,000 feet. The temperature was forty below zero. Ice was already forming on my oxygen mask and hose. There was no flak to be seen. "The Germans must be asleep today," I thought. Something was missing. Where was our fighter escort? No one had seen them and we were already flying over enemy territory.

As we reached the Initial Point, flak started coming up in front of us from the city of Gotha. Several bursts were now hitting in front of the formation and near our left wing tip. A burst ruptured right in front of our number one and two engines.

The number two engine began smoking. Buckey called back on the intercom, "Losing oil pressure on number two engine. What do you see, Robbie?" "Black smoke," I said. Wright came back with, "Feathering number two engine. I'm going to try to stay in the formation with three engines if I can. We were doing pretty good, keeping up with the formation." The black smoke was still coming from number two engine, even though it had been feathered. I could see it was more oil than smoke. The hot supercharger was making the smoke as the leaking oil was passing over it.

We were still with the formation when Wright said, "Number three engine can't take it. If I keep this up, we will lose the engine." We were dropping back from our wing position. Wright said, "We are almost over the target at Gotha." He opened the bomb bay doors and dropped the bombs.

The airplane jumped up and the bomb bay doors closed. Wright said, "That will help. But we still can't keep up. I am going to drop the airplane down to the overcast cloud cover as fast as I can. Then we'll try to make it back alone through the clouds."

I could see the formation up to our right at 2 o'clock high, dropping their bombs.

Tyler called out, "Fighters at 3 o'clock high." Wright said, "We can't stay any longer. Here we go." Again Tyler said, "Fighters coming at 3 o'clock." Wright dropped the left wing and

headed almost straight down. The speed seemed to make the number two engine smoke that much more. We were at 23,000 feet. I turned and looked at Cross. He was sitting in midair between the floor and the ceiling of the waist, by the ball turret. Tyler was standing in the air. I was pointing at Cross and he at me. I was in midair between the floor and ceiling. We were suspended in space. Dabbs called out on the intercom, "Two fighters coming in on our tail. They are following us down. I can't identify them yet. They are coming right for us."

Wright said, "Are they ours? If they are, fire a flare that's the color of the day. They'll see it and stay with us." Dabbs said, "I don't know but they are closing. I believe they are Me 109s." Wright said, "We will be in the clouds in just a second. We are going straight down. I'll flatten out at 6,000 feet, just inside the cloud cover."

If we had not been wearing our throat mikes, I don't believe we could have said anything while we were falling. We dove under power from 23,000 feet to 6,000.

Buckey said, "My ear drums are killing me." I was having trouble trying to clear my own.

Buckey said, "Wright, flatten this thing out. I can't stand any more." We levelled off just in the cloud tops and everything in the waist of the ship hit the floor at the same time, including me. We had been suspended in the air by the lack of gravity. Wright asked, "Dabbs do you see the fighters?" Dabbs said, "They broke away when we entered the clouds. I think they thought we were going down." I said, "I thought so, too."

We left a trail of black smoke and oil as we were going down. I told Wright on the intercom, "There is still some smoke coming from under the engine. Wright said, "We are not getting anything out of number three but it is still running and keeping the auxiliary equipment up."

We were flying on number one and number four engines. Wright was keeping the airplane just in the top of the overcast layer.

We were receiving no flak or ground fire that we could detect. We were only at 6,000 feet and well inside of Germany. We kept on going, limping along on two engines, with number two feathered and number three almost windmilling, putting out very little power.

We stayed in the cloud top until we reached the enemy coast line. There the cloud cover stopped. The airplane came out of the clouds into a clear sky above a sparkling ocean.

We made it back to the airfield on the two remaining engines. Our flying time had been a little longer than six hours. When we landed, the number two engine had started smoking again. We taxied onto the hard stand with the crash trucks following us. Before Wright cut the engines, the ground crew was spraying a fire extinguisher on number two engine.

We were all glad to be back on the ground. The truck arrived and took us to debriefing and we began to tell our story. The debriefing officer said we had been reported going down in flames. "They told us two Me 109s were on your tail and you were going down in flames," he said. "The whole formation saw you." "They were right, up to a point," I said. "We did have a smoking engine while we dove to lower altitude and two unidentified fighters chased us down. But here we are, safe."

The debriefing officer said, "You were lucky to get back. Thirteen other bombers went down behind you."

We gasped.

"Thirteen? I said.

The officer nodded. "Thirteen."

The debriefing officer said, "Thirteen down out of twenty-five. We thought it was fourteen down until you showed up. More may have gone down. If they're coming out, they should have crossed the channel and be here pretty soon."

"One hundred and thirty airmen lost!" I thought, "God, you rode with my crew today." It kept going over and over in my mind.

We had just finished getting out of our flight clothes when the rest of our formation began coming in. We all went out by the tower and started counting ships. Five airplanes were firing flares. They had wounded aboard. There were six more in the flight pattern. Eleven airplanes were coming back. Ours was the twelfth.

"Thirteen will not come back," I thought. "Why no fighter protection?"

We went back to debriefing to see if they had heard from any of the missing planes. "All the other planes were seen going down, including yours," said the debriefing officer.

Cross and I walked on back to the hut. I kept thinking, "One hundred and thirty airmen. If we hadn't made it back, it would have been one hundred and forty." I didn't know how many were wounded on the other ships but there was a large number. Again I could only say, "Thank you, God."

I was sitting on my bunk when Parkhurst rushed through the door of our hut. He was as white as a sheet. He had run all the

way from the flight line. He said, "My God! I had heard that Wright's crew had gone down and I ran over here to see. Boy, am I glad to see you, old buddy."

He came over to the bunk and put his arms around me. "Old buddy, don't ever scare me like that again." I didn't have anything to do with it but it was nice to hear that someone would miss you. He wanted to hear about what happened. I told him a little about it and then said, "We'll talk about it later." He said, "I have to rebuild some airplanes tonight. I'll look you up later." Parkhurst left.

This eleventh mission of mine was now over. There I sat, making notes in my diary and writing another letter to Elizabeth. Writing her made me feel better.

## A Lead Plane Hit

Wright came by late and told us that we were on alert to fly a mission again tomorrow, February 25. I asked, "Why us again tomorrow?" Wright said, "I don't think they have enough crews to make up a flight."

I was beginning to think that soon we would not have anyone left to fly. "The end will be soon," I thought. "But the hell with that kind of thought. I'm going to be here when everyone else is gone."

"See you at briefing," Wright said and then left.

The crew was already in their bunks. I was still trying to write to Elizabeth. My letters to her were about all that was keeping me going now. I crawled in under my blankets and before I knew it, here comes that damned Jeep through the dark. I was beginning to resent the sound of it. I even thought, at times, that I should shoot the sergeant when he walked through the door. I told myself, "Get that out of your mind." I was glad the sergeant couldn't read my mind when he walked in the door.

We were all up and dressed in a short time. We didn't even make a fire in the pot bellied stove. No one said a word. All of us were like a bunch of automatic zombies. We all walked together down the mud path to the mess hall, to the locker room where we got into our flight gear, then to briefing.

"The target for today is Nurnburg, Germany," said the briefing officer.

Only seventeen airplanes were going from Group. That was the most we could get in the air. The flight path looked like it was wandering all over Germany. The briefing officer said that there would be something new added today.

"We will have metallic chaff to throw out the waist windows," he said. He showed us some of the chaff: little pieces of foil that looked like Christmas tree icicles about ten inches long and wrapped in little bundles. It was supposed to deflect radar and keep the flak from hitting the airplanes. "The Germans are using radar more to aim their guns and their anti-aircraft fire is getting more accurate," said the officer. I thought, "They could have asked us and we would have told them that."

Jimmy Stewart would be flying the lead in the first flight. Our plane was to fly in the second flight.

Our plane would be just behind Major Stewart's ship. We would have plenty of time to study his flying skills.

The flight path was almost to Czechoslovakia. "Boy, what a long day this is going to be," I thought. "It was no telling what Stewart thought when he saw the chart."

All we knew was that Stewart wanted to go on all the missions. The high command was trying to put reins on him, for his own protection. The raids are getting deeper and deeper into Germany all the time.

The briefing officer said we must conserve fuel every way we could. He cautioned, "Don't drop your ball turret down into the slipstream unless you have to. If you use it, get it back up inside the plane as quickly as you can. Open and close your bomb bay doors as quickly as possible. You have ten hours of fuel and nine and one-half hours of flying time. There will very little margin for deviating from the planned path of your flight.

I looked at the red ribbon flight path and thought, "They are really trying to get rid of us." The officer said we would be flying through the Ruhr Valley, the heartland of Germany's war-making industry. "There are thousands of flak guns in the area that will be shooting at you," he said. "Airplanes carrying K-20 cameras in their camera hatch, do not forget to turn them on. The tail gunner will do this."

I thought, "The best idea would be to cancel the mission." After the briefing, we walked out to the truck. My feet were walking in one direction with the crew - my mind and body wanted to go back to my hut. I got up in the truck.

Jimmy Stewart climbed in the truck and sat down beside me. Alexander, our navigator, got in the front seat of the truck with the driver. It was still very dark. The truck lights were half blacked out so there wasn't much light. You hardly knew who was in the truck with you.

Stewart broke the silence. "Sergeant," he said quietly. "We are going to have a mighty fine flight today." I said, "Yes, sir. It looks like we really are."

The truck started moving slowly. It turned the wrong way to go to the airplanes. Major Stewart called out, "Where the hell are you going, driver? Hey, driver!"

The truck stopped. Alexander got out and came back to the rear of the truck, and said, "Major, I told him to stop by operation. to get my charts."

We all knew that Alexander had all the charts he needed in his briefcase.

Stewart said, "Damn. The hell with the charts. This damned war will be over before we ever get out to our planes. Get the hell in the truck."

Alexander jumped in the back of the truck.

Stewart got out and got into the front seat by the driver. Alexander sat down by me, grumbling about his charts. "I don't need the damned charts, anyway," he said. "I know how to get there."

The truck turned around and took off in the opposite direction. We were soon at the airplane. Wright's crew got out and the truck driver took Stewart on to the next plane.

While we were loading the gear, Alexander said, "Boy! Stewart is touchy today." Wright said, "If you had studied that mission chart, you would be touchy today, too." Alexander got in the airplane. Cook and I checked out the airplane. Wright started the engines. The flare went up. The mission was on. Wright let Stewart's airplane taxi out first and then we taxied onto the ramp and got in line for takeoff. We lifted off at 9:33 a.m. There were 4,800 pounds of 100-pound fragmentation bombs on board.

The waist was full of boxes of the new metallic chaff. Tyler and I were supposed to throw it out the window in little bundles in the flak areas.

We formed as usual and crossed the channel. Half way across, we test fired our guns. Cross pulled the arming wires on the bombs. As we crossed the coast line the flak started coming up everywhere. White streaks were coming from the ground. They

would look like pinwheels coming at you. I had never seen rockets come from the ground before. Some would burst and shoot out metal in all directions. Tyler and I decided that it was time to start throwing chaff. Out it went in little bundles. As soon as it hit the slip stream, the brown wrapper came off. Tin foil scattered back through the the formation behind us.

The flak seem to become more accurate. Everywhere we turned there was flak. Our fighters began showing up. They were some distance out, waiting for us to get out of the flak, but they were out there. There were several large formations of B-17s to our right and B-24s behind us as far as you could see. The flak had now stopped coming up.

I thought, "The flak stopped so the enemy fighters will soon show up." I saw our fighters were very high above us and way out to our right. The enemy could hit our planes before our fighters could get to them!

My right foot began to get cold. I looked at the shoe plug and it was plugged into the electrical outlet. I pulled my glove off and felt a hot spot just above the right shoe plug. I got one of the bobby pins from my coat sleeve. I pushed it into the cloth, catching the wires. I pushed the insulation away from the wires. The bobby pin held the wires together. The shoe started heating again. I thought, "Maybe I will get a new heated suit before I run out of bobby pins." The bobby pin on the patch under my arm in the suit was still in place and working well.

Cook in the top turret called out, "Fighters coming in at 12 o'clock." I only saw them as they passed through the formation. They went by so fast that I didn't get a shot off at them. The Me 109s made one pass and our P-51 fighters came closer to the formation. Some went after the Me 109s.

We were now reaching our Initial Point. Buckey said, "Bomb bay doors coming open." Dabbs in the tail turret said, "Robbie, turn the K-20 camera on. I can't get out of the turret." I reached for a walk-around oxygen bottle and plugged it on my mask, disconnected my throat mike and head set, and disconnected my heated suit. I waddled over to the camera hatch and turned on the camera. I then returned and plugged back in at my waist position. Trying to get around in the ship while wearing flight gear was like a Teddy bear in a bottle with lead weight.

Our target, an airfield, was now in front and under us. Flak was coming up everywhere. Tyler and I were throwing chaff out the windows as fast as we could. White puffs, black puffs - the

stuff was all around us and in the formation with us. The smell of cordite was getting strong in the waist of the ship. Flak was bursting at our wing tips.

I looked out my window. There were lines and lines of airplanes on the airfield below us. Maybe 200 or more. When I tried to count the rows on the field, Wright told Wittman, "For God sakes, get those damned bomb bay doors closed." "Bombs away," Wittman called back. Cross confirmed that all bombs had left the bomb bay, that none were stuck. The bomb bay doors closed. "Good timing," said Wright on the intercom.

I could follow our bombs all the way down. They were hitting all across the lines of parked airplanes. The whole formation's bombs were beginning to hit the lines of aircraft on the airfield. I called out, "Bull's eye. Every bomb." Tyler confirmed it, too. Bombs from the B-17s to our right and back at 5 o'clock were now dropping and hitting the buildings and factories alongside the field. It looked like everything was being destroyed on the ground. What a drop it was.

Jimmy Stewart had led us exactly to the spot where we were supposed to be to drop on the field. "That's one bunch of enemy fighters that will never get in the air again," I was thinking.

Our airplane's nose was almost under Jimmy Stewart's tail turret, about twenty feet back. Wright called out, "We got a hit." Then Buckey said the same thing. Everyone started saying, "Who got a hit?" "Jimmy Stewart's got a direct hit," Buckey said. "His ship got a direct hit, a flak burst in the flight deck. Just behind the nose wheel."

Wright moved our plane right up under the plane. Boy! What a hole there was in the bottom of it.

Wright dropped back a little. A brief case and what looked like a parachute pack fell out of the hole. The parachute hit the tip of one of the propellers on our number one engine and then went under us. Wright said, "He is staying there. The ship hasn't lost any speed." Wright tried to get the ship on the radio. "He's not saying anything," he said. "We're suppose to be on radio silence. I won't try again."

We were now getting away from the flak. I was beginning to think, "This chaff stuff is attracting flak instead of deflecting it."

I looked out the window and called out on the intercom, "Fighters! Me 109s. Ten o'clock. Enemy fighters coming in!" I began to count over the intercom. "One, two, three, four, five . . ." I cut off from the intercom but was still counting at sixteen with

more Me 109s coming. They were now coming through our formation. I had all I needed to shoot at.

The first wave took two B-24s out of the formation to our left and below at 7 o'clock. Both B-24s were now burning and falling. No one was getting out. I saw both ships hit the ground. Tyler hit me and pointed out his window. I turned and looked and a B-17 in flames was going down. I watched it hit the ground.

The formation stayed tight. I thought at times that our left wing man was going to stick his wing tip in our window. Flak started coming up again and the German fighters went for the B-17 group to our right at 5 o'clock that were not in heavy flak.

Every time we started throwing this damned chaff, the flak would burst inside the formation. Tyler and I threw out a full box of the stuff and I saw a burst explode almost on the box as it was falling.

The coast line was now in front of us. As we crossed it, we began to drop to a lower altitude over the ocean. We soon were crossing the English coast line.

Back over the field, flares came from several ships. They landed first.

The damaged ship landed just in front of us. As it touched down on the end of the runway, smoke came from it, and it broke in two at the nose wheel compartment. Wright was on the down leg and went on and touched down. We went on down the runway with Wright riding the brakes. As we neared the end of the runway, Wright turned the ship to the right, trying to miss the wounded ship. We stopped just off the runway on the ramp. I jumped out of the waist window and ran over to the broken airplane.

The tail of the ship was sticking up in the air and the nose was sticking up in the front. Just in front of the wing at the flight deck the airplane had cracked open like a egg. The runway had aluminum scars for some distance where the plane had been dragged.

Jimmy Stewart was standing by the end of the airplane's left wing tip. As I walked up to him, he looked at me and said, "Sergeant, somebody sure could get hurt in one of those damned things." I said, "Major we thought for a while that it was bad." Stewart, rubbed his chin. "I was thinking that when I looked and saw that big hole in the flight deck."

Stewart walked on up to the nose as I turned to meet Cross and Tyler coming toward us.

We walked on back to our airplane. Wright had to leave our ship on the ramp because we couldn't get it by the airplane. The other aircraft, still in the air, landed on the short runway. I looked over our ship quickly before the truck came to get us. There were flak holes everywhere you looked. I didn't try to count them for I really didn't care any more. It looked like an axe maniac had been chopping on it.

We got into the truck and it took the driver forever to get to the debriefing building. I told the debriefing officer about the damned chaff. "The stuff attracts flak," I said. He tried to convince me that it didn't. "It deflects radar, sergeant," he said. I said, "By God, you weren't up there today. I saw what it did."

After getting out of our flight gear in the locker room, I went back to the hut, thinking, We are going to get killed if it keeps up this way much longer.

The only good thing was, this was my twelfth mission. I thought, "God! How can I make twenty-five missions?" We'd been in the air more than nine hours. The fuel tanks must of had only fumes in them when we landed. We hadn't even thought about it.

I just sat on my bunk, looking at that damned pot bellied stove. It was cold. It didn't have any heat coming from it. It wasn't long before the rest of the crew was trickling into the barrack.

## Lucky Thirteen

Cross asked if I wanted to walk over to the mess hall with him. I didn't feel like eating. I just wanted to stay on my bunk but I said, "Yes. Let's go."

We walked down the mud path.

As we walked we began to talk quietly about the missions, and how we felt about what was yet to come. We both had lumps in our throats and tears in our eyes. I told Cross that I would not give up until I knew that there wasn't a chance to live. "Robbie, there are not many of us left," he said. "But we're still here, Cross," I said.

We got to the mess hall. It was empty. There was lots of food and no one around to eat it. From the mess hall we went by the mail room. There were letters from home for both of us.

As I sat on my cot, reading Elizabeth's letters, I could almost hear her voice talking to me. I could feel her warmth. I knew now

that I had to live. I knew what I had to live for. I had a reason to live. If I had ever needed Elizabeth, it was then.

The next three days passed and the weather was just more of the same "English weather." On the evening of February 28, we were told that we would fly the next morning.

The target was Lottinheim, France. It was the rocket coast again. We were held up on takeoff by the weather. It was 11:45 a.m. before we got off the ground and into the air. We were told to hit our target and only our assigned target. Our bomb load was 6,000 pounds of general purpose bombs.

We formed over England and crossed the channel and the enemy coast. There was no flak. Our fighter protection was everywhere you looked.

Wright opened the bomb bay doors but as we approached the target, clouds were covering it. The formation did a 360 degree turn and came back over the target area. The lead ship was to drop visually. The clouds were broken and still covered our target.

Part of the formation behind us was dropping its bombs. We were to drop when the lead ship dropped. The ship leading us went around for the third time over the target. Again we passed over the target area and didn't drop. The lead ship closed their bomb bay doors. When they closed, Wright closed ours. Everyone was griping. Wright said on the intercom, "We've been told to take the bombs back home."

Cross and I went into the bomb bay and put the safety wires back on the bombs so that we could land with them on board.

We crossed the channel and returned to England. The damned lead ship wouldn't drop the bombs. We were over the target three times, and knew where the target was but still didn't drop.

We touched down back at base at 1620 hours, four hours and forty-five minutes after takeoff. We had received no damage to the aircraft. The clouds had given near total coverage.

Back at debriefing, the officer said that this would count as a mission. I said to myself, "Hell, we have been on worse than this and they didn't count them as a mission. But I'm sure not going to say anything." For it to be thirteen, it turned out to be a very lucky mission. Maybe things were getting better. My morale sure needed a break. I was soon back at the hut and feeling good after the mission. I sat on the bunk and wrote in my diary. Then I started a letter to Elizabeth.

## First Raid on a Berlin Suburb

The next few days, the weather was beginning to get real bad. It was getting cold and icy. I was now more interested in keeping the pot bellied stove hot than anything else. Dabbs, Cross and I made several raids on the English coal pile so we would be sure of having coal. The coal pile was getting smaller. More Limey guards were assigned to protect the pile. Dabbs figured out how to get the guard away from the coal while Cross and I snatched a load.

Snow started falling on March 2. We were hearing rumors that there was a mission planned for the outskirts of Berlin soon.

The next morning, the Jeep showed up at 4:30 in front of our hut without warning. We were surprised that we hadn't been told the night before.

When we got to the briefing room, the curtain was drawn back from the chart. The flight path was all over the wall chart. The red line crossed Berlin but our group's bomb drop was to be on Orienburg, a suburb northeast of Berlin. This was to be the first daylight American raid on the Berlin area.

Snow was falling on the base but the weather was supposed to be better over Europe, the weather officer assured us. After we were dismissed from briefing, everyone got into the trucks and rode to the bombers.

Snow was accumulating on the ground and on the planes. The ground crew was sweeping snow off the wings. We got into the airplane and waited. The flare from the tower soon went up. The mission was on. I had to arrange the boxes of chaff in the waist of the aircraft so that we could get into our positions. There were so many boxes of chaff that we hardly had room to stand by our guns.

The group had patched up twenty-five airplanes to send out. I couldn't see a spare airplane anywhere on the hard stands as we taxied around the ramp.

I thought, "Well, we are all there is left." Group was putting up everything it had that could fly.

Snow equipment was cleaning the runway but the snow was coming down about as fast as they were cleaning it up. We were loaded with 6,000 pounds of 500-pound general purpose bombs. As we started down the runway, visibility was getting so bad that

you could see less than a hundred feet in front of you. We lifted off in the snow. When we broke out of the cloud coverage, there were patches of clouds towering to high altitude. We formed in and around the towering clouds.

Flak was spotty some distance away from us when we crossed the enemy coast line. Our fighter protection was flying along the sides of the formation, very close to us. The formation was now at 19,000 feet. The temperature was fifty-two degrees below zero. When I test fired my weapon over the ocean, the weapon turned white with frost all over it. I was afraid that it had frozen.

Dabbs called out on the intercom, "Two B-24s turning back, dropping out of formation." In a few minutes Tyler said, "Our right wing man is turning back. He is dropping out of the formation." Others began dropping out until we only had thirteen airplanes in the formation out of the twenty-five that we crossed the coast line with. We were lead plane in the second flight. Someone pulled up to our right side and took the place of the wing man that had dropped off.

"A lot of overworked and tired planes," I thought.

What was left of the formation was now reaching the Initial Point. Our fighters were still out there with us. There had been no flak close to us, so far. The clouds were getting thicker in front of us and were towering in spots and the spots were getting closer together. In the cloud breaks in front of us, I could see black puffs. It was beginning to come up very heavy. The white clouds were turning black where the flak was bursting.

The bomb bay doors came open. The formation was heading straight for the flak. Wright said, "We got a recall. Division wants us to turn back. Division doesn't think we have enough airplanes left to complete the raid the way they wanted."

The bomb bay doors closed. We were entering the edge of the field of the flak bursting in front of us. The lead ship was turning to the left, trying to get out of the flak. "Here we are, right on the edge of Berlin, and they want us to turn back," I thought.

On the way back, half of my heated suit stopped heating. The complete left half of the suit was cold. I tried to find out what was wrong with it but I couldn't make it work. They were going to give us new heated suits but when? "I guess the bobby pins have done all they can do for me," I thought. I just couldn't find where the wires were broken. The more I tried to fix it, the more I was exposing myself to the cold. I decided that I would just try to keep warm with what I had and tighten up my heavy jacket. I was

beginning to shake from the cold. I looked at Tyler and he was working on his heated suit. He was having trouble, too.

Dabbs, back in the tail turret, had two Army blankets pulled around him. It seemed that all of our equipment was breaking down.

Wright said on the intercom, "We are losing power on number one, two and four engines. The supercharger regulators are freezing up. Number three is the only engine that we're getting full power from." In a couple of minutes, Wright came back on the intercom and said, "The lead ship is slowing down. I think he has the same problem we have."

The formation was still together, all thirteen ships. Our fighter escort was still out there. They had been coming and going during the whole flight. There was always some of our fighters beside us.

The enemy coast line was now below us. The cloud cover stopped at the coast line. We were lowering our altitude but I was still shaking with cold.

A ground cloud cover was still over England as we approached land. The formation dropped down through it. Boy, did I feel better when I started warming up. I had to knock the ice from my mask and chest to get the mask off my face. Ice was nearly three inches thick on top of my flak suit.

The ground was covered with snow although the snow had stopped falling. The airfield runways were now clear of snow. Wright sat down and taxied onto the hard stand.

We were soon getting out of the truck and going into the debriefing room. The first thing the debriefing officer said was, "Today will not count as a mission. Division doesn't want to officially admit that we had an incomplete raid on Berlin."

We complained of equipment failure. Some had turned back when their electric suits stopped heating. Others returned to the field with frozen engine supercharger regulators. Some of the ships had severe frostbite among their crews. At sixty below zero at altitude, it was just too cold and too much weather for a mission with our equipment in the shape it was.

The officer wrote down all of our complaints. Every crew member that you looked at had a bad frostbite on each cheek below his eyes. The V burn had never healed good on my face but now I had some more blisters after today's trip.

The fact that this would not count as a mission was now soaking in. We all felt like we had been kicked in the seat of the pants.

I managed to get to the flight locker room and take off my flight gear. I threw the damned heated suit in the locker. I thought, "The damned thing is no good, anyway."

## Back With the Family

Tyler and I walked back to the hut through the snow. The only thing good thing about the snow was that the mud under it had frozen.

On Saturday, March four, the snow started falling again. The showers in the latrine froze. There was one faucet running in the face bowl. The steel helmet and the pot bellied stove got a workout, heating water.

Dabbs' liquid supply was the keg of black beer. Tyler and Cook were helping it along, too. The keg seemed to stay full, regardless of how much they drank from it.

Dabbs started using the end of my bunk to sit on because it was next to the pot bellied stove. That began to irritate me. I had never seemed to mind before. I told Dabbs, "I want you to keep your big hind end off my bunk. You have one of your own to sit on." He said, "Mine is not close enough to the stove." Cross and Tyler spoke up and told both of us, "Stop the bull before you start a fight. Save it for the Germans." Dabbs paused, then got up from the end of my bunk and sat on the floor by the pot bellied stove. We all were getting easily set off by every little thing.

Just before noon, Wright came to the hut and talked with us. "Operations thinks it's time we took a seven-day furlough. They say we should visit their rest home - if we want to."

When he said "furlough," I already knew where I was going. It was not to their rest home. I wanted to see my family in Nottingham again. Wright said, "Pick up your passes and leave any time you want to. Just be sure you are back at the base in seven days."

We all walked to headquarters to get the passes. I took a pillow case with me and went by the mess hall. I poured a lot of sugar in the pillow case. It was for my folks at Nottingham.

When I got back to the hut, I wrapped up some soap, and dug out the women's nylon hose that I had brought over with me from South America. I threw a week's supply of underwear and stuff in my handbag, put on my Sunday best uniform and headed for the train station.

I felt better as I walked. The snow I was walking in suddenly seemed pretty.

I had to wait about an hour in the train station. I read a newspaper, all about our air raids. The paper said there were rumors that the Eighth Air Force was near Berlin yesterday. I thought, "Rumors, hell."

The train finally arrived. I would have to change at a little town to get to Nottingham. An elderly lady and her husband sat next to me most of the way and tried to talk with me. I could only understand about half of what they were saying. They were talking to me about losing their son in the war. The train was slowing at the station where I had to change. I got up and said goodbye. The old lady extended her hand and I held it for a moment.

Just as I got off the train, I saw the train to Nottingham beginning to pull out of the station along another track. I ran like hell, carrying my handbag and the heavy pillow case of sugar and soap. I caught up with the train and jumped on it.

It was dark. I had not realized it but it was nearly 10 p.m.

I arrived in Nottingham very late. I tried to find a taxi and couldn't. I finally got on a bus that was going to Gordon Road, Kelham Green Estates. I recognized the area around the corner where I got off. I only had my little torch to see with. I turned down Kelham Green and looked for their town house. They all looked the same to me. I didn't want to be waking up the wrong family at this time of night. I kept looking at numbers. I walked up to look at one house number and a voice said, "Go away, Yank!" I turned and walked on.

I finally found Two, Kelham Green. I walked up to the door and knocked and knocked. The next door neighbors came to their door, looked out and turned a light on me. A man's voice said, "Go away, Yank. They won't come to the door." At that time, I heard the door make some noise and open. It was Connie with her husband behind her.

"Who knocked me up at this time of night?" Connie said.

I almost laughed. Then she recognized me and told me to come on in.

They both put their arms around me and welcomed me. As I walked in, Jean was coming down the stairs.

We sat in front of the fireplace, drinking tea. I gave Connie the sugar and soap. Then I took out two pair of nylon hose and gave them to Connie and Jean. They looked happier with the hose than with the sugar and soap.

Connie showed me to the empty bedroom that was her sons' room. They told me to get a good night's sleep. It was like being in heaven, to crawl into a nice, clean and soft bed.

It was almost noon before I woke. Everyone had gone to work except Jean. I asked, "Why didn't you wake me?" She said, "I looked in and you were sleeping so soundly."

Connie and her husband arrived at noon for lunch with us and then they had to go back to work.

Jean suggested that she borrow some bicycles so the two of us could go cycling. The ground had some snow on it but not as much as there was at the base at Tibenham. So, cycling it was.

It was a very pretty Sunday afternoon. The sun was shining but the air was quite cold. We rode through part of the town and out into the country. Jean was a good bicycle rider. I knew that she had ridden a lot. I found out that cycling could become a lot of work, but it didn't seem to bother Jean at all. After about two hours of riding and some walking, too, Jean said that she knew a club in the country that was not too far away. It was closed this time of year but she knew the people, and they would fix us a bite to eat.

We rode for another half hour, and came to a farm with a large house on it overlooking a swimming pool. The fields around the house still had spotty patches of snow. The temperature was not freezing but you could see your breath vapors.

We rode on up to the club house. The people seemed to be glad to see Jean but were surprised to see her with a Yank. They were a little cool toward me. I didn't understand what the people in this area had on their minds about Yanks.

Jean asked the man and the two women we met if they would prepare us some food. We sat at a table. They brought us some fish and chips, tea and crumpets. We sat in front of a big window, looking out over the pool of water. It was very pretty, in an English sort of way. Jean told me that she had sung here. She said she sang operettas and enjoyed music.

Jean told me all about her research with penicillin at the Health Services. She was a few years older than I was, wonderful

to talk to and interested in everything. She was very active, as I had found out on the bicycles.

I was almost dreading the long ride back to Nottingham.

Jean said to me after we finished eating, "I tell you what we should do." I said, "What?" "We should go swimming," she said. "In this cold weather?" I said. "Oh, come on," she said. "I can get us some suits to wear." I said, "Are you sure that the water is not frozen?" "No, it's actually warmed by a spring," she said. Jean asked the lady for some suits and we walked down to the bath house and tried on several to find one that fit. Jean was on one side of a partition and I on the other. I finally found a pair of trunks that fit and I was freezing. The air inside the bath house was really cold but I was determined not to back away from the swim if Jean insisted.

I met Jean by the door of the bath house. She was tall and very trim and pretty in a bathing suit. She laughed and dove into the water and came up, calling to me, "Come on in, Robbie." I was cold, standing there in the open air, so I dove in. The water was colder than flying over Germany. It took my breath away.

Whatever thoughts I had about Jean being trim and female were gone now. "Damn!" I said. "I sure can't stay in here very long." Jean swam across the pool and I followed. The second time across, I said, "We have to get out of here. I am freezing." Jean said, "Yes it is kind of cold." When we climbed out of the pool, I was beginning to turn blue. Jean seemed to enjoy the cold air. We went back into the bath house and dried off and changed back into our clothes. Then we walked back to the club house. I paid the lady for the food and tea. Then the lady wanted some money for the swimming suit rentals and the use of the swimming pool. I paid her more than I thought it was worth.

Jean rode off on her bicycle, with me following her. She turned when we got back to the main road and took another way to go back to the city. As we were riding along the road, several trucks loaded with Limey soldiers passed us. As they passed, they had plenty to say about the bloody Yank with an English girl. Jean apologized for them and said, "Don't pay any attention to them. They don't know what they are saying." It was getting pretty late when we got back.

Connie and Steve were waiting for us.

The next day, I visited the Fire Service with Connie and met some of her friends while Jean went to work. During the day, I went to the shops and bought some food and anything they would sell me without ration stamps.

Steve and Connie had a tradition that they had to visit the pub every evening for about a hour.

The days were passing fast.

I spent a day with Jean at the Health Ministry, going through the process of making and growing penicillin. Jean explained all of the processes. I saw large trays of cultures growing under controlled conditions. This drug was in its beginning and still not fully understood.

Before the week passed, I visited an English barber shop and had a haircut and a shave. It was nice to get a haircut in a barber shop again, instead of on the end of your bunk, until the barber nicked me on the Adam's apple of my throat. The barber didn't even have a tissue to help stop the bleeding. I was beginning to look like a stuck pig with blood on my neck and shirt. I paid the barber and, using my tie to help stop the bleeding, walked on out of the shop.

I started walking back to Connie's home, and stopped in a store that I thought might be a drugstore of some type. The shopkeeper looked at me with the blood on my shirt collar and tie. He started saying, "Get out of here, Yank. Get out of here." I knew I would feel like shooting him if I stayed in the shop so I walked out the door without saying anything.

I got back to Connie's home and washed up. She put a piece of tape on the nick. It soon stopped bleeding. I changed shirts. Connie cleaned the blood off the shirt and tie. I wondered if the Limey had done it on purpose. I knew then that it would be the last time that a Limey would shave me.

On my last day with the Stephensons, we went out to a nice restaurant at a private club that Steve knew. The dinner was good, by English standards. Everything nice and proper. To make conversation, Jean was asking about high altitude flying and the use of oxygen. I was about to explain to her when an American officer stepped over beside Jean and put his hand on her shoulder.

The officer said, "I heard you ask about high altitude flying."

He started to tell her why oxygen was needed. He was trying to make some points with Jean. She politely thanked him and told him that the staff sergeant she was with had sufficient experience and knowledge to properly explain the subject. The officer looked at me and said, "Okay, lady." He went back to his own table. Jean said, "I think he was intoxicated." I said, "He was wearing a paratroops badge, not wings. He's not Air Force."

The rest of the evening was very nice. We sat and listened to the small band that was playing. Connie and Steve said that we had better go. It was getting late.

We walked some distance back to their home. Everyone wanted to hear about America and I wanted to talk about home as well. Connie asked about combat over Germany. I said, "We have more important things to talk about. When I come the next time, I'll tell you all about air combat." We sat around the fireplace and talked until it was very late. Everyone had to go to work tomorrow and I had to go back to the airfield. Connie said, "You sleep until your train time. We will slip out and go on to work."

I was up when they got up. When they left for work, I went to the train station. The train would leave at 11 a.m. I walked around in town. I found a bank and went in and asked if I could send some money home to my wife in America. They told me that they could handle it for me. I had more than eighty pounds on me, some of which I had won playing Black Jack. I sent sixty pounds home and kept twenty. A pound was worth four dollars and three cents. The man in the bank gave me a receipt. I walked back to the train station.

I had to get back to the base that day because my furlough and travel time were ending.

The train finally left Nottingham. It was just a long and lonely train ride, after the warmth of this past week.

I arrived at the train station where I had to change to a train going to Norwich. The Norwich train was already pulling out. All I could see was the back end of it. I ran like hell, trying to catch up with it, but I couldn't. It was going too fast for me.

I went to the ticket taker and asked when the next train would be going to Norwich. The Limey said, "Tomorrow." I said, "No way. I have to be back tonight." A Limey saw me, and said, "Yank, you got to go somewhere?" I said, "I sure have. I have to be back at the Tibenham base tonight." He said, "I know a fellow what can take you if you pay him." I said, "How much?" "Maybe fifteen pounds," he said. "Okay, let's go," I said, and followed him outside the station and we both got into an old car.

He drove to a farm house. He said, "Don't worry, Yank. This is where he lives." I felt safe for I had my .45 in my shoulder holster under my coat. A Limey came out and talked to the driver. He said, "Yank, you want to go to Tibenham?" I said I did. He said, "I will take you there for fifteen pounds." I said, "Let's go." I

got out of the car and went over to a barn and got in another car. The man got in and we drove off, down a very small road.

After a very long drive, the Limey said that he had to get some petrol. In a little while, he drove up to a farm and behind a barn. A man came out of the house and filled the car with petrol. We drove off again down a small road. It was getting late and dark. The Limey did very little talking. I asked, "Are all the roads little like this one?" He said, "We can't drive on the main roads because the authorities would stop me. They would want to know where I got my petrol for the trip." After a while, he said, "It will not be long now. When I drop you off, I have to go on to Norwich and pick up someone to take back."

We soon drove up near one of the gates on the air base and he stopped. The driver said, "I am going to let you out here. I don't want anyone to see me." I had already paid him so I got out and started walking toward the gate. I looked back and the car was gone. I wondered if I was at Tibenham. I had been completely in the hands of this Limey driver. He could have taken me anywhere.

When I got to the gate, it was Tibenham. I was back. I sure didn't think that I would make it when I missed my train.

It was dark as I walked to the hut. I was the last to get back. Cross said, "I was wondering about you." He smiled curiously and said, "You sure do look happy." I told him about some of the events of the past week.

Cross later told me about his brief stay at the rest home and a trip to London. "When you didn't show up yesterday, I was beginning to wonder about you," he said.

I looked at my bunk and wondered if I could sleep in it after a week in a good soft bed. I saw some mail lying on the bunk and picked it up.

Cross said, "I picked it up for you at the mail room." That was music to my ears: letters from home. I had four letters, three from Elizabeth and one from Connie Alma Owens, the hula dancer in Miami. In her letter, the hula dancer said she had received the paper clipping that I had sent her. She said she was shocked and upset to see that I had a wife in Memphis. She had done nothing but cry about it. I had broken her heart.

I wondered if this was the last I would hear from her.

Elizabeth had written that she was getting along very well. She had been working a lot of overtime. She had seen my aunt and my cousin, Lillian, several times. She wrote that she was missing

me and wished that I could come home, that she worried about me more and more when she read the news.

Elizabeth said she had dinner with my aunt. There was a soldier at the dinner who came with Lillian. Lillian had met him at a hospital there in Memphis and had invited him to dinner. He was a sergeant in the Air Force and had been wounded on a bomber in England. He had been sent back to the States to recover. The airman had told her that I didn't have a chance of coming home alive. Elizabeth wrote that it had scared her and when she went home she cried herself to sleep. She said she couldn't get it out of her mind. She wrote, "Please, come home. I will be waiting for you. Just come home safe. I am sorry that I went to your aunt's house for dinner and heard the airman describe how it was where you are. He was almost a mental case."

I wished that Elizabeth had not talked to someone who had been in combat. Especially someone who had been wounded on a bombing mission and was a mental case.

I sat down and wrote all about the seven days that I had spent in Nottingham at Connie's home. I described her family and told how nice they were to me. I told her how much it had helped me to keep my mental attitude sound.

The next day, March 14, the weather began clearing up. The snow was beginning to melt. I started a good spring house cleaning. I took my bunk apart and rearranged the blankets. I still used ten blankets. I would never get used to the dampness of England.

I was feeling good, maybe even happy, for a change. Wright showed up at the hut and changed all that. He said we had a mission tomorrow. I thought, "This is a numbers game. Maybe I can make my fourteenth." The last one didn't count. While we were on furlough, the group had made a successful raid over Berlin.

I asked Wright, "What are we going to do about heated suits? I don't have one." Wright said, "Let's go by operations and ask them about it. I need a new one, too." We all walked to operations and were told that new heated suits had arrived, to pick one up.

Back across the base we walked to the quartermaster. The new heated suits were no longer a blue monkey suit. The suit was built into an Eisenhower Jacket, and a regular pair of army pants. We went back to the hut and tried them on. You now wouldn't have to wear a dress uniform over it. The jacket and pants looked like a

uniform. The suit was larger than the regular dress uniform but it would serve its purpose if you were to go down in enemy territory.

The shoes plugged into the pant legs, the pants into the jacket, the gloves into the jacket sleeves, and the jacket cord plugged into the ship's electrical system. It sure felt better than the old heated suit. Cross and I walked over to the flight locker room and hung the suit in our flight lockers. Boy! Was I glad to have the new suit. I thought, "Tomorrow will tell if it works or not."

The next morning, dressing in the locker room, I put the new two-piece heated suit on, over my long handle underwear. I pulled a pair of heavy white socks over my regular sox. Then I put on the heated shoes. Except for the shoes, I looked like I was in a dress uniform with an Eisenhower heated suit jacket. I had a dress shirt under the heated jacket. The gun holster and .45 automatic went on next. Then came my lightweight flight jacket, heavy fleece-lined pants and fleece-lined boots. The white silk gloves, heated gloves, heavy mittens, heavy coat with morphine tubes on the sleeve, parachute harness, May West with CO-2 bottles, flight helmet with headset, throat mike and goggles, oxygen mask, K rations, carbohydrate rations, regular pair of shoes, chest parachute, all went in my flight bag to take to the airplane and be put on just before taking off. The flak suits were left in the airplane so we would not have to carry them around.

I always put my wife's picture and my little Bible in my left shirt pocket, and my dog tags around my neck.

Cross and I still went through our flight gear check list every time. After being on a seven-day pass, I was afraid that I had forgotten how to dress out.

## A New Plane's Baptism in Flak

Wright came into the briefing room after the briefing had started.

The curtain was pulled from the wall chart. There it was: the target for today was Brunswick, Germany. Twenty-six airplanes would be sent out. Aircraft assignments were given.

Some new airplanes had arrived, the briefing officer said. Wright's crew would get one of them. This was good news to us.

Now we would have an airplane that we could feel was our own.



My Bible and my angel's picture sit on shelf above my bed.



USAF Photographic Collection  
P-38s form stair steps to heaven.

We were all anxious to see our new airplane, as if we didn't already know what a B-24 looked like.

This was the first time that I walked out to the truck to go to the airplane when I didn't feel like turning back. I wanted to see our new airplane. When we got to the hard stand, there she was: a pretty lady all in new paint, dark on top and light on her belly. It was like having your first date with your new girl friend. Her number was 652.

The waist was loaded with boxes of chaff. She was carrying 5,200 pounds of 100-pound incendiaries, and 100-pound general purpose bombs. After a good preflight check, I put on all the other flight gear that I had in my flight bag. A new heated suit and a new airplane - what else could anyone want? I sat an empty ammunition box by my window and laid half of a flak suit on it. Now I was ready to go. My steel helmet and parachute were lying on the floor beside the ammo box. We all checked in with Wright.

Up went the flare from the tower. The mission was on. Wright taxied out and got in line on the ramp to wait for takeoff. We were down the runway and lifting off at 7:45 a.m. There were clouds with some blue sky showing. We were soon above the clouds and it looked like the weather was going to be good. It was quite clear above 3,000 feet. Just a beautiful day at altitude.

As the formation crossed the channel, I test fired my gun. I had a brand new gun and it worked fine. The enemy coast was now under us. Dabbs turned on the K-20 camera. It was to run twenty minutes across the coastline and then again at our IP. The flak was spotty along the way to the target. Our fighter protection was out some distance from us. So far, there had been no need to throw chaff. The flak had not come near the formation.

Cook said, "Fighters at 10 o'clock! Coming in. Several Me 109s and behind them is a flight of FW 190s. They're coming in two waves." P-38s and P-47s saw them coming and dove straight for them from above us. The Me 109s and FW 190s broke their attack and went under us to get away from our fighters. The P-47s and P-38s turned and followed them. Six of the Me 109s were shot down in flames on the first pass of the P-38s. The P-47s were coming in just behind us. One P-38 was going down and I watched it hit the ground. The two FW 190s that were on its tail soon had three P-38s to worry about.

The dog fights between the P-38s, P-47s and the Me 109s and FW 190s were the most I had ever seen. Our fighter protection was really at their best when trying to keep the German fighters

away from us. I thought, "Thank God for the fighter protection." They were chasing German pilots and fighting in every direction that you looked. If our fighters had not been here, we would have been totally wiped out with the number of enemy fighters that were in the attack. Before it was over, it looked like the P-47s and the P-38s were fighting each other for position to shoot down enemy fighters. They were cleaning the sky. More American fighters were still coming in. Now our P-51s were showing up.

Boy! This was a turn of events. It was wonderful to see so many of our fighters. Maybe the powers that be were changing their minds on how to fight an air war.

We were now reaching our IP. The flak in front of us was bursting at our altitude. There was black smoke everywhere you looked in front of us. Tyler said, "Man, we had better start throwing chaff." The bomb bay doors came open and Wittman dropped our bombs. I tried to watch our bombs fall and throw chaff at the same time.

I was wondering how in the hell we were going to get through the flak bursts that were everywhere. They were even bursting between us and the ship next to us. The bomb bay doors closed.

White streaks were coming up at us from the ground. Some kind of rockets were bursting near us like flak. They were too near us. I had never seen as many rockets before as were coming up.

Three airmen in parachutes came across my left waist window, almost close enough for me to touch them. I called out on the intercom, "Three parachutes at 9 o'clock with men in them." Cook in the top turret said, "A rocket hit on one of our group's B-24s. At 2 o'clock above and in front. The ship is still with us." Seconds later, he said, "The B-24 is going down." I never did see the ship fall.

I could see the bombs hitting the city through the cloud break below us. Tyler and I were throwing chaff with both hands and bundles at a time. After we broke out of the flak, you could see for miles. The sky was blue above the heavy ground cloud cover. The temperature was twenty-eight below zero. My heated suit was working good.

On the return flight, the flak would start and stop unexpectedly without us seeing it coming.

I couldn't get our fighter protection out of my mind, after seeing the fight they had put up for us. Boy! We had the best fighter protection and fighter pilots in the world now. They sure

were doing a job for us. The enemy fighters got to us only one time and then our fighters were on top of them. I got several good shots with my new gun as enemy fighters passed under us.

Everything was looking good. I looked around to see if our new ship had any battle damage. I sure wanted to keep the new on this airplane, at least for a while.

We were back at the field and touching down at 1345 hours. Wright taxied to the hard stand. The ground crew chief was waiting for us. He was proud of the new ship, too. When we got out, I looked over the airplane. Under the waist, near the ball turret, were several flak holes. In the left tail section was a 20 mm hole. and the right tail section had some flak damage. "Well, the ground crew will have to put some patches on her, after all, I thought." "The truck soon came and we rode to debriefing."

There was a Red Cross trailer parked at the front entrance to the debriefing building. Two Red Cross women in the trailer were serving coffee, tea and donuts to the fliers as they came in. I thought, "You can never tell what good weather will bring out." After debriefing and changing clothes, I walked back to the hut and lay on my bunk. Tyler put some coal in the stove. I just lay there. Deep fatigue was setting in. The bunk never felt so good.

I began to think about the loss of one airplane today. At least three of the fliers had bailed out. They looked okay when they passed my window. They had passed over the top of our ship and very close to our props.

Out of twenty-six airplanes today, twenty-two made it over the target. One went down.

I made notes in my diary and put Elizabeth's picture up on my shelf. I lay on the bunk, glad that I had finally made my fourteenth mission. It had been the second try for fourteen. I thanked God for being with us today. None of the crew was wanting to make conversation. We crawled into our bunks. I fell asleep soon after.

It was early morning when I heard the Jeep coming. I knew that it wasn't for us for we had just come back from a mission. The Jeep stopped in front of the hut and the sergeant came in. He said, "Lieutenant Wright's crew is flying today." I stuck my head up and said, "There must be some mistake." He looked at his list and said, "No. Lieutenant Wright's crew is on the list." We all got out of the bunks, grumbling that no one had told us about flying a mission today.

I was having a hard time getting myself together. I finally made it to briefing. I was just so tired.

The briefing officer showed us the wall chart with the flight path. It went across all of Germany and France. The red ribbon passed by Paris and turned up into Germany, then north of Switzerland and then back down through the Alps Mountains.

## Friedrickshafen, Germany

The target was Friedrichshafen, Germany on the German side of Lake Constance. Fuel was going to be a problem. It was estimated that we would have nine and one-half hours of flight time and ten hours of fuel. We were to do everything possible to conserve fuel. "Don't start your engines on the ground too soon and get in the air as quickly as possible," said the briefing officer. "Don't use your ball turret. Don't keep the bomb bay doors open long."

The weather was going to be good. We were on the runway and lifting off at 8:15 a.m. We formed in a beautiful sky and climbed to 20,000 feet. As we crossed the enemy coastline, I could see our fighter protection in every direction that I looked. There was very little flak coming up around the coast. Flak was only spotty along the way. We were about half way to the target when Cook said, "Enemy fighters. Two o'clock." Tyler said, "P-38s going after them." The P-38s engaged several flights of Me 109s and FW 190s. The P-38s were all over the German fighters. The P-47s turned back. They must have been low on fuel. The P-38s didn't need the P-47s. They were having a field day with the German fighters who were popping up everywhere and hitting the ground every few minutes.

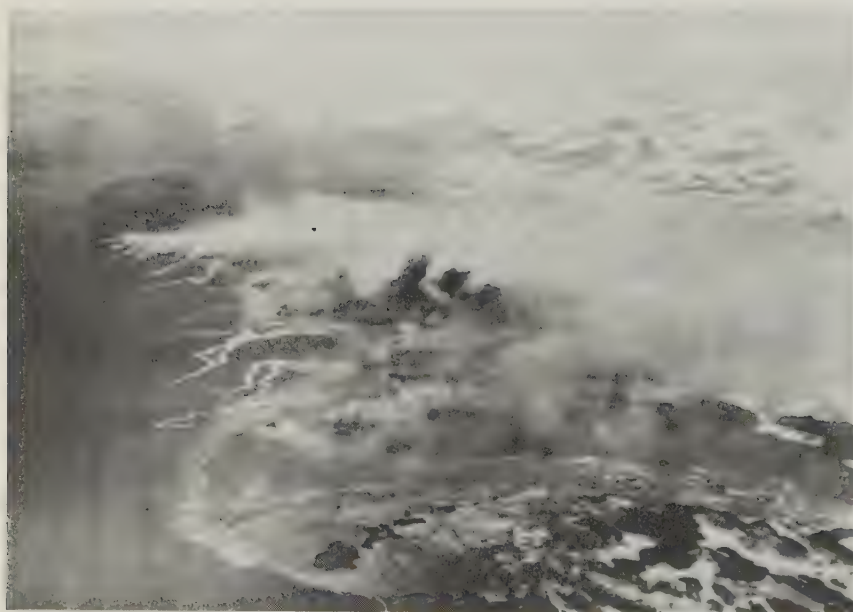
Not one German fighter got close to us.

We reached our IP and the bomb bay doors came open. To the northwest, the spotty clouds were becoming solid. The cloud cover below us was becoming solid. Flak was coming up at the edge of the cloud front. We flew into the clouds of flak covering the sky over the city, white bursts at one altitude and black bursts at a lower altitude. Clouds covered the north part of Lake Constance. To the south at 2 o'clock, I could see the Alps. We crossed the lake into Switzerland and made a big 360 degree turn. Then the whole



We deliver.

USAF Photographic Collection



Friedrickshafen reels.

USAF Photographic Collection

formation made another run through the flak across Friedrichshafen.

For some reason, we were not to drop unless we saw the target with our naked eye

As we passed out of the flak above the city, Wright closed the bomb bay doors. The P-38s were still with us. Our altitude was lowered to 12,000 feet. We were missing most of the flak areas and P-38s were around us all the time. What a relief.

There were all kinds of targets that we could have dropped our bombs on. The ride back to base was long and discouraging. We passed airfields with airplanes parked on them. I could see big factories, even cities that were not sending up flak.

We passed close to Paris and all its famous landmarks were in full view. There was very little flak coming up from Paris. It looked like one flak gun was firing from the Eiffel Tower.

Division had ordered us to bring back the bombs and not drop them in France. Wright was griping about the weight and the amount of fuel that the bomb load was using. There was a good tail wind and it was saving the day. That is why we were at such a low altitude, taking advantage of the tail wind to conserve fuel.

We carried the bombs all the way across France and Germany and all the way back for nothing but the ride. I was beginning to think that the Germans knew this and were just letting us go. They had let us fly at 12,000 feet across their country without much of a fight. Only once in a while we would get a few flak bursts.

We were beginning to see the enemy coastline in front of us. Cook called out, "Fighters coming in at twelve o'clock high!" About 20 Me 109s passed through the formation and then came back through from 4 o'clock. On the second pass they hit a B-24 at our 5 o'clock and it was going down smoking. Just before we reached the coast, our P-38s and P-47s came back and were on the German fighters. The German fighters dropped to the ground level with the P-38s and P-47s following them. We went on through a heavy flak area at the coast and out into the channel. The formation dropped down to 6,000 feet and crossed into England.

We arrived at our airfield after more than nine hours of ferrying bombs around Europe. I looked over the airplane and saw a few small flak holes in the bomb bay doors. I didn't try to count them. I was almost sick from not dropping our bomb load after such a long flight.

Soon the truck arrived and we were on our way to debriefing. Of the twenty-two airplanes sent out, eleven had

dropped their bombs in the target area. Two had failed to return. Cook said, "I saw one of them go down." I knew that one went down at the coastline of France. I had not seen the other one go down and I didn't know that eleven of our ships had dropped bombs on our second pass on Friedrickshafen. I sure didn't see them do it.

The day had been long and I was so tired I could hardly stand on my feet. I was tired before I had left that morning. This was two days in a row that we had penetrated deep into Germany.

By the time I arrived back at our hut, it was 8 p.m. and getting dark. I sat on the bunk and started writing a note in my diary. The air raid siren sounded. We all went outside to see where the German bombers were. Searchlights were sweeping the sky. There was still a glow in the sky. You could see the search light beams in the dusk of the night. I watched the lights pick up a German bomber. I said, "The heck with all of this." I went back in and went to sleep. I never knew when the all clear came or anything else until morning.

It was 10 a.m. when a sergeant woke me up the next day. He said that we had to be in full dress uniform at a formation in front of headquarters at 1400 hours. We all cleaned up. Cross even cut my hair and I trimmed up his. It was a lot better hair cut than I got at the English barber's shop in Nottingham. Cross, Dabbs and I walked to the mess hall. The food, for a change, tasted good. I was just hungry.

## Our Thinning Ranks

While we were at the mess hall, Dabbs and Cook got into a fuss over nothing. Tempers were short. Van Bogelen said, "Why don't you two shut up?" Cross and I moved to another table to eat in peace.

The mess hall was almost empty. There just weren't many crews left to eat. The 702nd Squadron was almost wiped out at Gotha, Germany. No replacements had arrived yet. The 700th Squadron, was almost gone, and several of our crews of the 703rd had gone down. Cook and Dabbs finally shut up, each trying to get the last word.

After mess, we went to operations, and then to headquarters to find out what the formation was all about.

At 2 o'clock we were all standing at attention in formation, by the flagpole in front of headquarters. The group commander presented us with medals and citations. I received a Citation and an Oak Leaf Cluster to add to my Air Medal.

After the ceremony, we all went back to the hut. No one seemed as excited about getting the cluster as they did the original Air Medal. The Cluster was the same as another Air Medal. Now I had two.

Wright and Buckey came by the hut and stayed a while. Wright said, "We're scheduled for another mission tomorrow." I didn't care if we flew or not. We didn't seem to be accomplishing anything. It was becoming such a waste of lives: just losing airplanes and men for nothing.

I wondered who was doing all the planning, sending large formations of bombers all the way across Europe and returning without dropping the bombs. Whose side were they on, anyway? It just didn't make sense to me. But I wasn't running this war.

I tried to forget the war and where I was. I just tried to think about Elizabeth and what we would do when I returned home. I lay on my bunk, thinking about my angel and our home. It made me feel better

## Did Germany Have the Super Bomb?

Morning came and the Jeep arrived as usual. I couldn't find my steel helmet. I knew that I had brought it to the hut for I had heated water in it. I ran to the quartermaster building and told a clerk that I wanted a steel helmet. I had to wake him up for it was 4:30 in the morning. He said he couldn't give me one, that I would have to come back later. I tried to tell him that I had to fly on a mission and couldn't wait until later. He said, "That's your problem." I said, "We'll see who's problem it is." I drew my .45 automatic from my holster. "You are a dead soldier if I don't get me a steel helmet and quick." I walked around to the shelves behind him with my .45 at his back and got one. He said, "I'm going to report this."

I finally caught up with the crew at the locker room, dressing for the mission. I told the crew what I had to do to get a steel helmet. We were soon in briefing. When Wright came, I told him

about the helmet problem. Wright said, "Forget about it. Why didn't you go on and shoot him?"

The officer pulled the curtain from the wall chart. There it was again. "The target for today is Friedrichshafen, Germany," he said. I wondered what in the world the Germans had there that would send us back across Europe to hit again.

"Germany is well on their way to building a super bomb, in and near Friedrichshafen," said the officer. "We must destroy that capability.

"You will be seeing a large formation of B-17s, just after you bomb the target. They will be coming up from Italy to hit the same target. They should arrive just after your formation clears the target area. Don't keep them waiting."

The weather officer said, "The weather front you saw before has moved far to the north. The target will be clear."

The next officer said, "You will have a good tail wind today. That will help the fuel situation a lot, but you must conserve as much as possible."

We were soon out loading into the airplane. The waist of the ship was again full of chaff. I could hardly get to my gun position for all the boxes. Tyler and I rearranged everything, making more room.

The group was sending out twenty-six airplanes today. "I sure hope we drop some bombs today, and it's not just a joy ride," I said. Wright lifted off the runway at 9:55 a.m. Our load was 5,200 pounds of incendiaries and general purpose bombs. The weather was clear with not a cloud in the sky. Wright soon climbed into the formation. There were plenty of airplanes going today. They were forming everywhere you looked, group after group.

The formation crossed the enemy coast at 20,000 feet. It was going to be a long ride. Spotty flak was now coming up. Tyler and I started throwing some of the chaff out the windows. Our fighter protection was all around us. The P-38s seemed to be staying with us longer than they used to. When they turned back, more would come take their place. It looked like they were getting this relay thing down pat. We were going to have fighter protection all the way, without gaps, it seemed.

As we got close to the city, our P-38s were all around it, outside the flak. The formation went north of Friedrichshafen. It looked as if we were bypassing the target. Alexander, the navigator, said the B-24s were now crossing into Switzerland. We flew on for some time, then turned south over some very high

mountains. We turned back west into a valley. Three Swiss Me 109 fighters approached our formation. They had Swiss markings painted all over them. Four of our P-38s came up behind them without firing, and flew behind and beside the Swiss Me 109s. The fighters turned away from the bombers and left for the mountains with the P-38s.

We turned, inside Switzerland, and headed west toward Lake Constance. We opened our bomb bays on the east side of the lake. Across the lake was Friedrichshafen.

Flak was coming up like mad. There was red flak, black flak and white flak. White streaking rockets were bursting in front of us at our altitude. As we entered the city, flak began to bounce the airplane around. I was jumping from the bursts. The smell of cordite was strong in the waist. We dropped our bombs from 23,000 feet. I could see bombs, dropped by the planes ahead of us, bursting in the city. Our bombs were hitting in the center of the mess on the ground. Ground debris was actually blowing up through the formation at 23,000 feet, nearly five miles up. I had never before seen ground explosions reach this high.

We finally got through the flak and ground debris. Wright closed the bomb bay doors. I couldn't think of anything that we could have hit that would have caused such disturbance on the ground that we would feel it this high up.

As we came out of the city area, two B-24s were turning toward Switzerland. I wondered why they were not going to try to make it back to England. One of them passed my waist window, about one hundred feet away, and the waist gunners were waving goodbye to me. I couldn't see anything wrong with their airplane. At 8 o'clock, large formations of B-17s were coming from the south. We were going west, leaving the target area. There was more B-17s coming up from Italy than I had seen in England.

Six B-24s near us had one or two engines feathered and they had a long way to go to get back home. Three of the B-17s were going down after being hit by the flak coming up behind us at 7 o'clock. The smoke from the city was well above our altitude as I looked back. B-17s were flying through it and the smoke was thousands of feet above them now. Our fighter protection - pretty P-38s - were beside us.

As we flew through flak, the fighters would move away from us and fly around the flak. Some of the flak was very accurate and heavy at our altitude, bursting inside our formation.

Several Me 109s tried to get to us. The P-38s dove after them and followed them to the ground. Several Me 109s hit the ground. We were now miles from our target. When I looked back, I could still see smoke rising to a very high altitude. The ground explosions were just unbelievable. I could now see Paris out the left waist window. The Eiffel Tower was still there.

"Well, today makes up for the last trip on March 16," I thought. We have wiped out the whole area.

As we crossed the enemy coastline, only spotty flak came up. The weather was just perfect for flying, though the temperature was thirty below zero. Except for flak over the target area and three fighter attacks, I didn't have much to do but watch our fighters destroy enemy aircraft.

Ice was a problem on my oxygen mask and hose. I had to keep knocking and squeezing my hose to keep oxygen flowing. No one had much to say. We just watched the bombing and looked for fighters. It was one long flight.

Wright set down at the airfield at 1840 hours. We had been in the air eight hours and forty-five minutes. That tail wind, on the way to the target, had been a big help on air speed, and fuel consumption.

It was good to get back on the ground.

We came back with several flak holes in the underside and bomb bay doors of the airplane. I thought, "Before long we'll be calling our new ship 'Patches.'"

At debriefing, we all tried to talk at once, about so much debris coming from the ground. The debriefing officer said that we had hit a super bomb manufacturing plant. Well, whatever it was, we sure hit something big. For our little bombs could not have sent smoke and debris that high.

We all went to the mess hall after getting out of our flight gear. It was hard to try to eat when your body and stomach hadn't yet got back on the ground. When I got to the hut and sat down on my bunk, I could only think, "Only nine more to go. Then I can go home to my wife. Just nine more."

I wrote to Elizabeth about seeing the Alps twice in three days. I didn't know how much of it would get through to her. Every letter I wrote was censored. In her last letter she had written that they had cut out everything but the first line and the last line of one of my letters. As I sat there trying to write, I tried to fight off total fatigue. I fell over on the bunk and the next thing I knew, it was late the next morning.

It was a very pretty and cool Sunday morning. The only way I knew the day and date was my little calendar that I kept on my shelf. I kept it marked so I wouldn't lose track. Life was a big numbers game now.

Cross said, "We should name our new airplane. It had now taken us on several missions safely. Everyone on the crew wanted a different name. We just couldn't agree on anything. Tyler said, "We had better ask the ground crew chief if he has a name to throw in the pot." We all went to the mess hall together and then out to the hard stand. It seemed that this was the most serious thing in the world and had to be done immediately.

The crew chief was working on the ship Number 652 when we walked up. We asked him what he thought about a name. He said, "I'd like to name it Tennessee Dotty, after my girl friend in Chattanooga." We all walked to the officers barracks and talked to everyone on the crew except Alexander. He was on the base somewhere.

Wright said, "The crew chief has to keep it flying all the time. I think it would be nice to let him name the ship." Everyone agreed. So the bomber Number 652 was christened Tennessee Dotty. Walking back to our hut, there was still some argument going on. Cross said that he would come up with a logo to go on the ship. We agreed. No one else wanted that job.

It was almost impossible to agree on anything anymore. When we were not on the airplane, everyone did his own thing.

## New Trick From Dabbs

Dabbs decided that he was going to town. He had been to operations to find out if we flew tomorrow. He said they told him we wouldn't fly. Dabbs got his steel helmet, opened the back door of the hut, and threw the helmet out the door on the ground. He then took out his .45 automatic and fired four shots at the helmet before he hit it. He walked out, picked up the helmet and showed it to us. I told him, "Dabbs, you have gone nuts."

Dabbs said, "I am going to show this helmet to my girl friend. She will feel so sorry for me that she will love me all night."

Dabbs got dressed and we didn't see him until the next day. He had left the field without a pass and slipped back in across the back of the airfield.

Cross spent the next few days dreaming up a logo for Tennessee Dotty. There had been a girl painted on Bullet Serenade. No one wanted a girl painted on this ship. Cross got some leather from some old jackets at quarter master, and cut out ten squares, one for each member of the crew. On each one, he drew a rabbit holding a slingshot with a bomb pulled back in the slingshot. I thought it was real good. Cross and I spent several days painting all ten of them. We went to the crew chief at the hard stand and showed it to him. I told him that the crew didn't want a girl painted on the airplane because Bullet Serenade had a girl on her. He thought the logo was pretty good. Cross and I drew the rabbit on each side of the nose of the ship, and painted it. It looked good.

We walked back to the hut, kind of proud of ourselves. Cross gave each one on the crew one of the leather patches that we had drawn and painted. We all sewed one on our flight jackets.

We now had an official logo.

As Cross was trying to find material to make the patches, one of the clerks at quartermaster's wanted to sell him an old Brownie box camera. Cross bought the camera and soon found out that you couldn't buy film for it. Cross and I looked for film at the field's S-2 photo lab. The sergeant there gave us some but we had to cut the film down to fit, then roll it onto the spools in the camera. Cross was going to take pictures on the next mission, if he could.

The sergeant at the S-2 photo lab showed us pictures that had been taken of some of the missions we had been on. Cross asked, "What are you going to do with all these pictures?" The sergeant said, "Burn them." "Could we get some of them?" I asked. He said, "I can't give you any but if anyone took some, I wouldn't care."

We found pictures taken on several raids that we had been on. We took several copies of each.

We viewed some of the pictures through stereoscopes and could see three-dimensional views of damage on the ground. I could see inside of the bombed out factories and houses. You could even see tools and machinery in the shell of the factory walls.

While we were at the S-2 lab, the sergeant told us there was a rumor that Jimmy Stewart was leaving the 703rd.

"We hear he's going to be transferred to Second Wing Division Headquarters," the clerk said.

"How in hell did you hear something like that?" I asked.

He shrugged. "They say he's been flying too many missions."

Scuttlebut inside quartermaster's even had a name for a man to replace our boss as squadron commander: Major Maurice F. Casey Jr.

We cut the chit chat and got out of there. We couldn't wait to get back to our hut to tell the crew about the rumor. Losing Major Jimmy Stewart as our squadron commander would be just one more blow to our morale.

"You think it's true?" Dabbs said?

"We'll probably know pretty soon," I said.

## Jimmy Stewart Rumor Makes Us Blue

My contacts with Jimmy Stewart had made me respect him as a leader. Somehow, he always made me feel that he was my personal friend. I knew that when I had ten missions, Jimmy Stewart had flown five of them alongside or near us.

We had heard that our squadron commander had been told to fly only one mission in every five that the squadron had to fly. He could pick the mission he wanted. Major Stewart had been picking all the worst missions to fly. He skipped all the milk runs. High command didn't like that.

I could remember when Medcalf's crew went down and their first engineer was AWOL, and missed that last flight with them. Major Stewart had said, "How do you punish someone for not getting killed?"

Stewart had a great feeling for each man in his squadron. You felt it when you were around him. Even when he was trying to give you hell for something you deserved, he got his point over without hurting you deep inside.

March 24 came with the sergeant in his Jeep waking me up for a mission. Walking from the hut to the mess hall, I could feel that the weather was perfect.

The target for today was St. Dizier, France, about one hundred miles northwest of Paris. When I saw it on the wall chart at briefing, I knew that we had passed right by it when we brought the bombs back from Friedrickshafen. I wondered, "If we are going to bomb it now, why didn't we bomb it then when we already were over the place with a load of bombs? That's just the way we run this war."

The weather man smiled and told us the weather would be perfect.

The crew got on the truck and rode out to the hard stand. Our airplane never looked better. The logo and the name on her nose really made her look good. Tennessee Dotty was a real lady. Everyone had good things to say about the logo. For once, there was no complaining. I told Cross, "No complaints? You've really accomplished something."

Wright lifted off at 0700 hours. We were loaded with 5,200 pounds of incendiary bombs. The sky was really pretty and clear as we climbed into formation. We were not even making many contrails. As we entered the enemy coastline, flak started bursting inside our formation. It was so close that it made me jump, every time it would burst. Tyler and I threw chaff as fast as we could. The chaff didn't do any good, other than giving us something to do.

We were out of the flak area in a few minutes. Our fighter protection was now closing in around us. They were in every direction that you looked. You could see P-51s and P-38s flying in groups of four, all around the formation. As we reached our IP, you could see that St. Dizier was totally covered by clouds. The cover had just moved over the city. That was our weather officer for you.

We had been given an airfield as a secondary target to hit. We bombed the field and hit right on top of the hangar buildings and across the airfield. It was completely destroyed, every inch of it. We made a perfect bomb drop. Smoke was now reaching nearly 3,000 feet. The only flak came from one gun emplacement. I could see ground flashes and flak bursting near the formation. One of the P-51s saw the gun and went straight down for it. The flak gun stopped shooting, then blew up from the P-51 fire.

On the way back from the target, we flew very close to Paris, much closer than we had before. The Eiffel Tower stood out like a sore thumb with the city around it. I could see the entire city very clearly. We had no enemy fighter attacks. Every time they tried to come close to us, our fighters were on top of them. We had so many P-38s they would play around with their rolls and loops to have something to do.

As we crossed the enemy coastline again, the flak became very accurate. It was bursting in the formation and around our airplane. It wasn't heavy, as it had been over the big cities, but it was accurate and right alongside us.

It was so close that each puff of flak smoke seemed to be followed by metal fragments whacking at the side of our ship. Tyler and I would turn and look at each other. "How are we still flying?" I wondered.

We crossed the English Channel and dropped down toward the airfield. Wright sat down on the runway at 1520 hours. The flight had taken seven hours and twenty minutes.

The crew chief was waiting to see how much damage he had to repair overnight. We counted ten good flak holes and a few deep scars from spent metal. Some holes were as big as your hand.

The ground crew would put a piece of aluminum over each hole and rivet it onto the airplane.

The truck picked us up, and in a few minutes we were in debriefing. I told the officer how clear Paris had been, so close up. "It looked like it had never been bombed," I said. He said, "To my knowledge, it never has been."

I was now through with my seventeenth mission but it didn't seem to be important. I was beginning to think there would be no end to it. The crew was moody. We didn't say much to each other anymore. If I didn't get letters from Elizabeth, and read them over and over, I would loose my mind. Elizabeth filled my mind whenever I could shake the memory of flak and rockets and enemy fighters chasing us.

We spent the next day, just lying around and feeling sorry for ourselves. I tried to keep my mind on Elizabeth.

Wright came in and looked around. "We are on alert for tomorrow," he said.

March 26 found us back in the briefing room. The mission was to hit the French rocket coast again at Siracourt. We were loaded with 5,000 pounds of general purpose bombs. "Takeoff will be at 1200 hours," said the briefing officer. This was the latest that we had ever taken off to go on a mission. We formed and crossed the channel with twenty-six bombers from our group. All around us were other groups of B-24s.

## Bomber Vanishes In Fire Ball

As we flew over the French coastline, flak started bursting right in the formation. It looked as though the Germans waited until we were right over them before they turned loose with the flak guns.

The Germans were getting more accurate all the time. The target was just inside the coast and we were quickly at our IP. Wright opened the bomb bay doors and Wittman dropped the bombs.

I watched the bombs fall. They hit the target, almost a bull's eye. I said on the intercom, "Wittman, you are getting to be awful good with that bomb sight." He said, "Hell! I always was good."

I thought of things to say, but I didn't.

The weather was perfect and you could see for miles. The ground below us now was nothing but bomb craters. Everywhere you looked, there were only bomb craters.

Shortly after leaving the target, four batteries of flak guns began firing at us. I could see the flashes on the ground. The flak was bursting in the formation at our altitude. It started bursting in the formation of B-24s to our left at 8 o'clock. One minute, a B-24 was in that group. The next minute, it exploded and vanished from the sky. It just disappeared in front of my eyes. It almost took out another B-24 with it. The B-24 beside me bounced around and recovered from the blast of the one that exploded and vanished. The doomed B-24 had received a direct hit.

Flak again started exploding in our group. One shell burst in front of our left wing, just in front of our number two engine. It exploded almost in the cockpit, just outside of Wright's window. I could see a cowl flap hanging on the number two engine. I called out on the intercom, "We have a hit on number two engine." Wright said, "That flak was almost up here in the seat with me." Number two engine stopped turning. Wright feathered it.

Wright said, "Do we have a fire on number two?" I looked out the window and said, "Only some oil blowing over the top of the wing. No fire." Wright stayed with the formation until we crossed the enemy coastline.

Our fighter protection was out there with us. We had seen no enemy fighters. As we crossed the English coastline, Wright began to fall back from the formation and sink to a lower altitude. It was some time before we reached the airfield. The other airplanes were in the landing pattern as we got near the field. They allowed Wright to break into the pattern and land.

We taxied onto the hard stand. When we stopped, I jumped out of the ship and looked at number two engine. It had one good-sized hole through the front of the engine and the top cowl flaps were torn off. The ground crew would only have some patching to do, and the engine had to be changed before the ship would fly again.

The truck arrived and we went to debriefing. We had been in the air five hours and fifteen minutes. Debriefing didn't last long. Back in the hut, I made some notes in my diary.

The next night, Parkhurst, the ground mechanic who had washed out of gunnery school, came hurrying into the hut. He said, "Do you know how many airplanes we have lost since December?" I said, "No. How many?" "We have lost thirty-seven airplanes," he said. "Can you believe that? Thirty-seven airplanes lost in combat. And we have eight planes in the hangars that won't fly and we're taking parts off of them. Old buddy, we don't have many planes left. You know, if you fellows keep this up, I won't have anything to work on. I saw the engine on your plane and the new one they're putting on it."

I didn't feel like saying much. After a minute, Parkhurst said, "Well, take care of yourself, old buddy. I have to go to work."

After Parkhurst left, Cross asked, "Does that guy talk all the time?" I said, "Cross, you have seen him about as much as I have. They must keep him pretty busy."

I thought Parkhurst was a pretty nice fellow. I was glad to see someone come around once in a while and act like they were concerned about you.

The next few days, the weather got pretty good. There was still enough dampness to keep the path to the mess hall muddy. To pass the time, Van Bogelen, Cross and I went to the shooting abutment and shot at targets, using the .30 caliber carbine, .45 automatic, and the .45 caliber Thompson submachine gun. Cross could shoot good and hit the target almost every time.

I was beginning to wonder, with the weather like it was, why we were not flying missions. Cross said, "It takes time to patch up the equipment. Enjoy it while you can."

I looked up Henry Parkhurst, and found him working on an engine in the hangar. We talked for a while and he went back to working on the engine. He was interchanging parts from one engine to the other.

The next few evenings were spent playing cards and writing letters.

On April Fools Day, Dabbs wrapped his left arm with bandages and put it in a sling. He dashed some red antiseptic on the white bandage. Then he put his dress uniform coat over the arm. "Dabbs," I said, "what in the hell are you doing?" "I am going to see my girl friend," he replied. "I am going to tell her that I am

wounded and I will get anything that I want." "Where is this girl friend?" I said. "Just on the other side of the airfield, near Tivetshall," he said. "I just walk across the field and through the fence to her farm house."

Cross told Dabbs, "One of these days, you are going to get caught up with. Your luck will run out."

"I'll have fun until it does," Dabbs said. He dabbed a little more red on his bandage and left.

## A Country Hunt

Dabbs walked out of the hut with his arm in the "bloody" sling, and picked up his steel helmet with the bullet hole in it. "What a nut," I thought. "Some English girl is going to swallow his story."

Dabbs put on his bullet riddled helmet. It reminded me of something Parkhurst had told me earlier.

"Group sent out some planes today to Ludwigshafen and lost two of them," he had said. "They sure had better start sending replacements soon or this group won't even exist any longer."

The next day, Cross, Van Bogelen and I decided to go hunting. The Limey who picked up our laundry had told us that, on the north side of the field where he lived, there were pheasants, and plenty of rabbits to hunt.

We checked out Thompson submachine guns and took our .45 automatics, and a couple of carbines and we walked to the farmer's place. We saw a country house and walked up to it and knocked on the door. The house was built of stone and had a straw roof. "Look at that," I said, pointing at the cornerstone on the house. It had 1492 engraved in it. "That must be the number of the house. It couldn't be when it was built." When the farmer came outside to talk to us, I asked him what the 1492 stood for. He said, "The stone was put there in 1492." I could hardly believe that such a house could be still standing. I asked about the straw on the roof. "Oh, that's been changed several times," the farmer said. "The last time was in 1918."

I knew that things were old in England but this thing was built the same year America was discovered.

The farmer showed us where to go to shoot pheasants. We walked down the path by the hedge rows and into the field. We had

walked some distance when a pheasant rose in front of us. Three submachine guns fired at the bird at the same time. The pheasant fell to the ground. I picked it up and there was three bullet holes through it that you could put your finger through.

The noise from the submachine guns had chased away everything else for miles around. We didn't see any more pheasants. The farmer had wanted a pheasant so we took ours to him.

We walked down to the hay stacks. There were rabbit holes everywhere around the hay stacks but no rabbits to be seen. Our guns had scared everything away. We were still arguing over who shot the pheasant and we were making all kinds of noise.

The farmer came out to the hay stacks. I think he thought we were going to shoot rabbits with the submachine guns. If we had seen one, he would have been right. He said, "Yanks, this is the way to get rabbits." He had a ferret on a collar and chain. He let the ferret go down a rabbit hole while he held the other end of the chain. He then pulled the ferret back out from the rabbit hole. The ferret had a rabbit in his mouth that was bigger than he was. The farmer grabbed the ferret behind his jaws and took the rabbit from his mouth. He did the same thing again and the ferret brought him another rabbit.

The farmer said, "Do you want some rabbits?" We all said no. We walked back to the old house with the farmer. We thanked him for letting us hunt, and for showing us how to catch rabbits. All the way back to the airfield, we were arguing about who shot the pheasant. Of course, I was the one that hit him.

This day had been something different, and had lifted my morale a little, if it could be lifted.

We took the guns back to the quartermaster. Back at the hut, we told everybody about our big hunting trip.

The evening was passing slowly. Cross was complaining about a head cold. He said he was feeling bad. He did look bad and he was coughing. He left to go to sick bay to get some medicine and see a doctor.

Wright came by the barracks later and told us we were on alert to fly tomorrow morning. "Make sure everyone knows," Wright said. Dabbs had not come in yet and Cross had gone by the sick bay. This was going to be another long night. I sat on my bunk, just looking at the pot bellied stove.

## The Song of the Engines

It was April 8, early in the morning. The Jeep was coming. It woke me up, stopping and starting and then stopping in front of our hut. The sergeant came through the door, saying, "Wright's crew flying today." I looked over at Cross' bunk. He was missing. He had not come back from sick bay. Dabbs had come in sometime during the night.

I finally made it to briefing. Wright came in and said, "Cross is in the hospital. We'll get a replacement ball turret gunner." I didn't like replacements.

The briefing officer pulled the curtain back from the wall chart. The target was an aircraft factory at Brunswick, Germany. "This will make the third time we've had to go to Brunswick," I thought. We had lost a bomber there. I wondered what today would bring.

When we got to the hard stand, the ground crew had finished loading the airplane with ten, 500-pound general purpose bombs.

The replacement ball turret gunner showed up. He was a very quiet and likeable fellow. He had flown several missions, and his crew had several casualties. He was now filling in, trying to complete his tour of missions. I missed Cross. Even Tyler said something about missing Cross. He showed his emotions which surprised me because he was always quiet about everything.

Wright lifted off the runway at 10:05 a.m. We were held up for some reason. Wright had turned the engines off and we sat a while before takeoff. Group was sending out thirty-four aircraft. It had received several new aluminum colored aircraft and some of them were flying for the first time today. They stood out brightly against the drabness of the other airplanes in the group. They would make a good target. The new ships were a new model, the B-24J. The sky was full of airplane formations crossing the English Channel in a long line.

Our fighter protection began to appear. It was nice to see them again in full strength. The flight was long, with spotty flak along the way. Things would get dull as we watched our fighters, and then flak would shake us up a little. The weather was as clear as a bell. Visibility was many miles. I was beginning to know where I was in every part of Germany. It was like looking at a relief chart all the time. The ice on my mask had to be knocked off, every

few minutes. The temperature was twenty-five below zero but my new heated suit was working well.

Flak was coming up over Brunswick in front of us. Plenty of it. The spent metal from the flak bursts began hitting the airplane. The bomb bay doors came open, and Wittman dropped the bombs. I watched them fall along with bombs from other B-24s around us. I could see them all the way down. The bombs hit all over the aircraft factory. The bomb bay doors closed, and we were on our way back. I thought, "If I stuck my head out the window too far, some of the spent flak metal could hit me. Hell, it could hit me, anyway. The aluminum skin of the ship isn't that much protection."

After we got out of the flak, it was very peaceful just to hear the moan of the wind and airplane engines. It was getting to be like a song. I knew that as long as I heard the hum of the engines and the wind we were on our way back.

I was almost in a trance when Cook called out on the intercom, "Fighters! Twelve o'clock coming in. Must be thirty or forty all at once!"

They are coming straight for us. The next thing I knew, they were passing by my window at our wing tips, with me firing straight into them. I could see the pilots and their oxygen masks in the fighters as they went through, one after the other. Me 109s shot past us. Then came FW 190s behind them, all on a frontal attack on the formation. One FW 190 flew between our wing tip and our left wing man.

The Me 109s and FW 190s made one pass through us, and were now hitting the formation behind and below us.

After the first pass through the formation behind us, I counted seven B-24s going down. Dabbs said, "They are destroying the whole formation!"

Some of ours were hitting the ground. Two of ours just blew up. No parachutes were coming out.

Our fighter protection was finally beginning to come in. The P-51s were on their tails. I just kept counting the German aircraft falling. Six were going down and two of the pilots bailed out. The P-51s and the P-38s were having a real cleanup day on the German fighters. Our P-51s would just roll and seem to play after shooting down a German fighter. God sure was with us. "How did our plane get through such a fighter attack without getting hit?" I wondered. I would never know. It just had to be in God's hands.

It wasn't long after the fighters rescued us that we crossed the enemy coastline and were out over the channel. The weather

March 25, 1944

Dear Harold,

Darling I love you and miss you so very much.

Honey I havint received a letter from you recently and the time goes so slowly when I dont hear.

I love you so very much and think of you all the time.

I dreamed you were home with me last night, we were so close and I had to wake up and find you were not here with me.

It makes me feel so lonely after my dreams, but at least I have my dreams to hold on to.

I hope and pray your missions will be over soon and we will be together again forever and build a new life together.

Let me know as soon as possible when you have finished your missions, we have so many planes to make.

Please take care of yourself just for me, remember I love you and will forever

I live for your letters please keep writing and I will continue to write each day

Even though you are so far away our love will last forever & we will always be together. Love you,  
Your wife, Elizabeth

A letter from Elizabeth . . .

was perfect and the English coast never looked better. I tried to count our group's airplanes as we were landing. It seemed that we had all got back home, some with wounded aboard, and others with mechanical troubles. Several fired flares before landing. We touched down at 1645 hours. We had been flying seven hours.

I looked the airplane over. We only had two holes in her. At debriefing I learned that we had lost one B-24 out of the thirty-four that went out.

My nineteenth mission was complete. Six more to go. Then I could go home to my wife.

Just the thought of it made me feel good.

Early the next morning, the Jeep stopped in front of our hut. We were called out again.

## Formation Comes Apart in Clouds and Fog

I was still fatigued from yesterday's flight and had trouble getting myself going. I had to force myself to get to briefing. Physical and mental fatigue had me almost to a point of not caring what was coming next. Briefing procedures were dull. I looked around the room. The other flight crews seemed to be showing wear, too.

We were to hit a rocket and aircraft assembly plant at Tutow, in the northern part of Germany. Our aircraft would be loaded with 5,000 pounds of general purpose bombs.

Among the flight crews at the briefing were two new flight crews. I studied them, wondering if we looked that green when we first started flying. They stood out among the old crews like sore thumbs.

Wright lifted off the airfield at 7:45 a.m. Just as we were leaving the ground, two B-24s hit each other in our flight path. There was a terrific explosion. The concussion pushed our airplane up. I watched three parachutes come out of a piece of one of the falling aircraft, and open up.

We finally climbed to our formation, and took our position. Our formation was now gaining altitude and heading out over the North Sea. We flew straight into a cloud bank towering in front of us. When we came out of it, we found ourselves all alone. It was as if we were the only airplane in the sky. Wright said on the intercom, "Where in the hell did they all go?"

We didn't turn back. We kept on going, alone. I was straining my eyes, looking for another airplane. I sure didn't want us to stay up here by ourselves. In a few minutes, one B-24 broke out of the clouds and headed for us. It pulled up to our right wing tip. "Here comes another one," I said on the intercom. This one pulled up to our left wing tip. I told Wright, "You are the lead man now." Another four more formed with us. We now had seven. I called, "Five B-24s heading for us from 8 o'clock." Wright slowed the speed and let them catch up with us.

When all the B-24s caught up to us, they formed with the three of us. We now had a formation of twelve ships. It was a nice feeling to have some company with us. Wright had been heading in the direction of the target all the time. He said on the intercom, "We are going to the target with what we have. Maybe we will pick up some more airplanes as we go." I said, "Wright, I haven't seen a single American fighter yet. I don't think we have any fighter protection. They don't know where we are."

"They'll find us," he said confidently. "We're going to the target."

He told Alexander, "Find a path to the target and give me a good heading."

Soon we were leaving the Baltic Sea and making landfall on the coast of Denmark. I called out, "My God! Ten o'clock fighters! It looks like about forty Me 109s." The sky was full of them, and us with only twelve airplanes. The fighters turned and came straight for us. They were now turning and coming in through the formation at 12 o'clock. Their 20 mm shells were flashing all around our wings. Those little red puffs were all around us. Then the Me 109s passed through. All twelve of our airplanes were still in the air.

The fighters were passing at the end of my gun. I was firing right into them. Cook in the top turret said, "He's coming apart! I got him!"

One Me 109 was falling apart at 11 o'clock, coming right at us. Parts of the Me 109 were going over the top of us and the other part exploded just to our left. Buckey was saying on the intercom, "Good shooting! Good shooting!" Cook said, "I got him! Did you see it, Robbie?" I said, "Yes, he blew at 7 o'clock."

The Me 109s must not have had fuel after making that one pass. They turned and left us. We crossed the coastline with very little flak coming up. I had so many empty shells on the floor that I could hardly stand. I scooped some of them up and threw them out

the window. I sure had given my gun a work out. I knew that my bullets were hitting the fighters for I could actually see them bounce on the fighters as they passed me. We were soon over a target and opened the bomb bay doors. The other eleven ships dropped when we did. The weather was clear over the target area. Wittman's bombs found the airfield and factory, dead on, a bull's eye.

On our way out, near the enemy coastline, we passed another small formation of B-24s to our left. They were in some flak that was coming up from the coastal area. One of them received a direct flak burst. Nine parachutes came out and opened before the airplane fell over and headed for the ground. I watched it hit and explode, hoping that the tenth man would bail out before it hit the ground.

As we crossed the North Sea, heading back to England, clouds began to close in on us. Wright dropped the formation to a lower altitude to get under some of it. The fog was thick, all the way down to the surface of the ocean. I could still see the formation staying close to us. There were only three from our group with us that I could see. The other planes were from other groups and had just formed with us. As we crossed the English coast, the ships from the other groups pulled away from us and headed toward their own airfields.

Wright picked up our field on the G-Box (radar). We finally found the field visually. The G-Box didn't work good half the time and Wright wasn't sure that it was our field until he was over it. The fog was so dense that we could only see about half of the field as we flew across it. Wright formed a landing pattern with the wing men and we were the first to try to land. The ground personnel were firing flares on each side of the foggy runway. Glare from the flares was confusing. As we approached, we began to see the runway. We were lined up wrong, heading straight for the trees and bomb dump. Wright pulled up through the fog and went around.

There were now a few more aircraft flying the landing pattern in the fog. We didn't know how many more, but we saw one as we climbed back into the landing pattern. Wright made another pass at landing. When we got to where we could see the runway, Wright saw that he was not lined up and he pulled up again.

Wright didn't know what the spacing was between the ships flying the landing pattern. As we turned in on the approach again, there was a B-24 just a few feet in front of us, making its landing approach. Wright slipped and stalled our airplane to slow it down.

Then he straightened up and followed the tail of the airplane in front of us.

The ship touched down on the runway just a few feet in front of us and Wright came down almost on his tail. We both were between the flares on each side of the runway. Buckey, watching the plane ahead, said on the intercom, "Keep that ship going and get off the runway. For God's sake, get off the runway." I could see our brakes smoking. Both Buckey and Wright must have been riding them. The ship in front cleared the runway. He knew that we were coming down behind him. He kept going when he made his turn at the end of the runway onto the ramp. Wright turned the other way at the end.

We were down on the ground, safe. "Thank God!" I thought. Another ship behind us passed a few feet over our heads. He wasn't lined up and was trying to climb and go around again. We taxied on around the ramp to our hard stand.

This was the worst fog and weather to try to sit an airplane down in that I had ever seen. Visibility was about fifty feet. We had been in the air seven hours and thirty minutes. "God sure rode in our ship today," I thought.

My twentieth mission would be complete as soon as debriefing was finished. I was counting now - only five more missions to fly. The happiest thought I had was: I'm going to get out of this stuff and back to my wife. This mission-a-day stuff would see me finish my tour quickly - or get me killed.

I didn't know who was figuring the odds but I was told that one out of three airmen were living to finish their tour. That was a lot better odds than when we started. The odds in the beginning were that no one could finish twenty-five missions in one piece. Well, the odds were changing for the better. One out of three was better odds than no odds at all.

No one had ever told me the odds until I got to England and flew into combat.

## The Lord's Prayer

On April 11, we were once again over Europe. Cross was out of the hospital and the crew was all together once again. The target for the day was Oschersleben, Germany. The plane was being loaded with six, 1,000-pound general purpose bombs.

Everything, and everyone, was working like an oiled machine. Wright lifted the airplane from the runway at 7:45 a.m. We formed and were soon leaving England. As we entered the enemy coast, our fighter plane protection was beginning to show up. They were right beside us. They were the main reason our odds were better now than in the beginning.

As we flew over the Brunswick and Hanover areas, flak came up, heavy and accurate. The fighters were relaying about every ten minutes, some turning back and some arriving to take their place. We were now reaching our IP. The target was in front of us. I could see the airfield and buildings. Flak was turning the sky black in front of us. Bomb bay doors came open and the heavy load of bombs left the belly of the ship. The airplane jumped up from losing the load and the bomb bays closed. Flak was bursting all around us, slapping the sides of our plane.

We were told at briefing that the Royal Air Force Spitfires would meet us after we dropped and would be part of the fighter escort to bring us home. I had seen our bombs make good hits on the airfield and now I began looking for the Spitfires. It had always been, in the past, that when the RAF was supposed to escort us, they never showed up. It was the same today. Here came the Me 109s and Me 210s. They were coming at us from every direction. We were all calling out, "Fighters. Twelve o'clock - 10 o'clock - 3 o'clock - 9 o'clock - 6 o'clock - above - below us."

Everyone was shooting in a different direction. German fighters were all over us. Dabbs said, "Two B-24s going down in our formation. In the flight behind us."

The Germans were going to take us all down, one by one.

Tyler said, "P-51s coming at 4 o'clock!"

"Thank God," I said to myself. Our fighter protection now was on top of the German fighters. I watched three Me 109s hit the ground. The P-51s stayed with us all the way back. When one group of P-51s left, another took their place. Wright was back at the base at 1500 hours. As soon as we got back to the hard stand, I looked the airplane over and didn't find a single bullet hole! I thought, "How could it be possible that all those 20 mm shells could have missed us?" The enemy fighters had been a swarm of bees.

My twenty-first mission was complete. Only four more missions to fly. Cross had missed four missions that I had flown on. He was trying to catch up by flying with other crews when he could. He had nineteen missions. As I walked back to the hut with him, I was kind of bragging. "I'll catch up with you," he said.

"Only four more missions," I kept thinking, over and over. It was the happiest thought I ever had.

It was late in the evening when Wright came in the hut and told us we were to fly in the morning. After he left, I lay on my bunk, thinking about the two bombers we had lost today - with twenty men on board. I had not seen anyone get out of them. Twenty-six airplanes sent out and two went down. The odds were not good. Sooner or later . . . The air raid siren started.

I got up and walked outside the hut. Searchlights were sweeping the black sky. Long beams of light were swaying back and forth across the sky. I walked a few steps to the right of the hut. There was Cook, sitting on top of a coal box by himself, looking at the light beams sweeping the dark sky in the distance. I sat down beside him. "Well, it's a good clear night for the Germans to play hell with the airfields," I said. Cook said, with a frog in his throat, "It's a good night to get us all killed." I noticed the insecurity in his voice. It wasn't like Cook. He was always positive about everything.

Cook had never showed his emotions.

I said, "Cook, only God knows if you or I will be killed, or when, or where. That is not in our power to know." He said, "Robbie, you seem to always have it together. Nothing seems to bother you." "Cook, that is far from the truth." He said, "Robbie, I just don't want to die yet. I have a girl in Miami that I love. I want to get back and marry her. I want to go back to her. I know she is waiting for me." I said, "Cook, do you believe in God?" "Yes," he said. I said, "I know there is a God in Heaven taking care of us or we wouldn't have made it this far. Look what He has done for us already. Look what He did for us today."

"Robbie, I have never been very religious," he said. "That doesn't make any difference," I said. "God is with us if you want Him to be. He has even told us what to say. You know the Lord's Prayer, don't you?" "Yes," Cook said.

We sat together there on the coal box with the searchlights scanning the the distant sky, saying the Lord's Prayer together, and asking God to help keep us safe through our missions, and to help stop this war and bring us safely back to our loved ones.

Finishing, we sat there in silence, watching the searchlights in the sky. Cook said, "You know, I am convinced that God will be with us all the way. Something just told me that inside of me." "Cook, I am felling the same thing," I said. I reached and held Cook's arm for a minute. We both had tears in our eyes and a lump

in our throats. I said, "We will make it. I really can feel God's presence here with us." Cook held my arm a few moments and said, "Yes, Robbie. God is with us." We walked back to the hut door, with an arm around each other's shoulder.

I lay down on my bunk, thinking, "I really never knew Cook before this. He is human just like I am. With emotions, feelings, and beliefs. Cook was always so distant. Until tonight."

I fell asleep, feeling that God was beside me to show me the way. I was sure of that, more than ever. I really felt that I had heard Him talk to me.

## Fighters In My Face

The Jeep woke me as it approached the hut early the next morning. I was more fatigued than ever. A little sleep just didn't seem to do much good anymore. The sergeant came through the hut door, saying, "Wright's crew flying today."

Flying every day was for the birds, not humans.

Preparing for the mission was totally automatic. I wasn't even sure that I had my eyes open. I made the long, slow walk to the mess hall, then dressed out in flight clothes in the locker room. I saw Cook smile a little. He seemed more pleasant than usual. Maybe it was unusual to see him smile at me and speak. Tyler seemed to be complaining more than usual. Maybe it was just me. I was having a hard time getting everything and myself together.

As usual, Wright was not there for the start of briefing. When the briefing officer would ask about our pilot, Buckey would always repeat, "He'll be here shortly. He's on his way."

"Our target is Zwickau, Germany," the briefing officer told us. We were to hit an aircraft assembly plant. The briefing officer said that there would be some high clouds in the target area but the target itself would be clear.

Wright showed up at the end of the briefing.

Everyone took their time getting out to the trucks and to the airplanes. It was going to be a late takeoff. We were to wait for the weather to move out of the target area at Zwickau. The weather front would move later in the morning, the weather officer had told us. The airplanes were loaded with 4,200 pounds of one hundred pound fragmentation bombs. We loaded all our flight gear onto the plane and then sat under the wing as Buckey continued to brief

Wright on the mission. On the flight form, I wrote 9:30 a.m., April 12 and handed it to the crew chief.

Cook was going over the slip stick, checking the load and balance so we could find the center of gravity so we could properly trim the plane when we were in flight.

The flare finally went up from the tower. We all got into the ship and Wright started the engines. He taxied out to the ramp and got in line for takeoff. We lifted off the runway at 10 a.m. The weather was good over England and there was no problem in forming the formation. The 445th Group was sending up twenty-six airplanes this morning. This was about the best that it could do. By now, Division had expected us to get up forty-five airplanes but our losses had kept Group from doing it. Enough replacements had not arrived.

As the formation crossed the English Channel I tested my gun and confirmed that it was working properly. We entered the French mainland at Dieppe. There was no flak coming up there. Our fighters were now along both sides of us and above us. I sat on the empty ammunition box that had half of a flak suit laying on top of it. I was getting prepared for a long and uneventful flight, just watching the wonderful P-38s flying with us out there in groups of four. They were really something to watch.

Wright was flying lead in the second flight today. We were just below and behind the three airplanes in the first flight. "Look at that bank of clouds and the weather front in front of us," Wright said on the intercom. "It looks like it starts at 15,000 feet and goes up above 30,000 feet. I wonder if the lead ship is going to try to climb over it or go under it. I don't think we can top it."

Buckey said, "We could never top that cloud."

Wright said, "This pilot is going down under the clouds." He began to let down and soon called, "We are at 15,000 feet."

I looked above us and there was a solid layer of clouds about 2,000 feet above us. The ground looked pretty close.

There were only nine of us left in the formation. The other box of B-24s either tried to climb over the cloud front or they had turned back. Wright said, "I think we are getting a recall."

In another couple of minutes, Wright said "We are getting a recall. We are turning back." Tyler said, "Our fighter protection went over the top of the clouds and stayed with the other formation. We are down here under the clouds by ourself, just the nine of us."

Wright said, "Keep a good look for enemy fighters."

I was watching the ground and suddenly little dots were moving along the ground at 10 o'clock in the far distant ground haze. I called out, "My God! Fighters coming in at 9 and 10 o'clock." Tyler looked over my shoulder and said on the intercom, "There are more than twenty fighters in a V formation coming." I said, "It looks like five V formations, one behind the other."

I started counting dots as they began to turn into fighter aircraft. The first wave was now firing at us. I started firing, trying to just pick the nearest one to me and stay on him. I could now see that they were Me 109s coming in the first wave. I kept firing at the fighter in the middle of the first V formation that was coming straight in my face. I could see my bullets going into him. As the fighter came at me he began to come apart. It was like slow motion. First his wings fell back and then he exploded.

Cross said, "Robbie you got him! You got him!" Dabbs said, "Three B-24s going down behind us." Now the second wave was on us. They were in my face and I was shooting all I could. I was trying to remember to keep it in bursts, so I wouldn't burn up my gun. Dabbs said, "Here they come at the tail. Damn, we are out here by ourself!"

The three B-24s that were behind us were hitting the ground.

Dabbs said, "The God damned fighters are just sitting on our tail!" I said, "Shut up and shoot!" I could still hear him trying to talk as his guns were shooting. At that moment a ball of fire was over our ship and came over our left wing man. "I got the sonofabitch," Dabbs said. "It was an Me 109." I said, "They're all Me 109s. Keep shooting and stop talking." I saw two more Me 109s going down below us. They had been on our tail and were so close that Dabbs was firing right into them.

Dabbs had knocked down three Me 109s! I forgave him for any foolishness he had ever done to me or anyone else on the crew.

Wright had broken radio silence and was calling for help: "Anyone. Mayday. Mayday. We need fighter protection. We are under attack. Mayday. Mayday." Wright was soon talking to some of our fighters but they couldn't find us. Van Bogelen was sending out position signals and asking for help. He was burning up his radio.

Our left wing man got a hit in his right wing and the aluminum was burning. He moved in close to my window. I could see the aluminum leaving the wing and burning into the fuel tank, just feet away from me. I said on the intercom, "Wright, get away from our left wing man. He is going to blow." Wright moved over

and our left wing man moved over with us. I saw their right waist gunner watching the wing burn. The door opened on their camera hatch and a pair of legs were hanging out of it. I thought, "Someone is trying to make up his mind to jump." In a moment, he left the airplane. I could still see the two waist men in the ship. They were not a hundred feet from me. The tail turret gunner was still in the turret and shooting. The ball turret was down but no one was in it.

The Me109s were after our left wing man from above and below. Cross was shooting point blank into an Me 109 on our left and under our wing man. The Me 109 blew up. The explosion pushed our ship up.

At the same moment, the tail turret on our left wing man broke and fell off with the tail turret gunner still in it.

Now the ship didn't have a tail turret and his right wing was burning off at number four engine. He was now turning to the right and fell away from us. At about 200 yards, the B-24 blew into little pieces. Some of the debris hit us. No more parachutes got out.

When Wright felt the explosion, he opened the bomb bay doors and dropped the bombs and closed the doors. Tyler punched me and over the intercom said, "Look! Look!" I looked out his window. Our first flight lead ship was about to drop his bombs. His right wing man had his left wing under him and the bombs fell and knocked the left wing off at the fuselage.

The crippled B-24 turned on its right side, with its right wing pointing down. The nose of the aircraft was just feet from our left wing tip. I could see the pilot and co-pilot and the nose turret gunner. It looked like it was going to hit us at our right waist window. The nose turret passed just inches under us. I looked out the left waist window and looked into the flight deck as it passed under us without its left wing. Nothing was there. The wing was ripped from the fuselage. If part of the wing had been there, it would have cut us into.

As it was coming toward us in the right window, I threw my arm in front of my face to keep from seeing it hit us. Tyler had done the same thing. When I realized it didn't hit, I turned to the left window. All the hydraulic lines were hanging where there had been a left wing. I could see the two waist gunners lying against the left waist gun. Gravity must have been holding them. The airplane moved out about 200 yards and blew up.

My mind could hardly retain all it was taking in. Wright and Buckey were saying, "My God. He dropped his bombs on that

ship!" Cook was still firing away at fighters and hit one over the waist window. The Me 109 was coming apart and blowing up, just outside my window.

The damned fighters knew that they would get all of us now. Lieutenant Wittman said, "That tail gunner on the ship in front of us is going to kill me. His shells are coming through my nose turret." Wright said, "The bullets?" Wittman said, "No, the empty shells falling from his guns."

There were now only three of us left in the formation. Wright moved up on the lead ship's right wing and moved in tight to him. The fighters were now all over us. They knew they were going to finish us. I could see the German pilots looking at me as they passed my window.

Dabbs said, "My guns will not shoot. Robbie, check my ammunition box." I looked at the box and said, "Dabbs, you don't have any left."

I turned back to my gun and kept firing at the fighters as they passed my window. I could see the end of my ammunition in my ammunition rack. I wouldn't be doing too much more shooting. I was trying to save some for the fighters that were just in front of me.

I began to fire in shorter bursts as I saw the end of my ammunition belt starting up the rack toward my gun. In a few seconds I would be out of ammunition.

## I Am Hit Twice

Something heavy hit me below and to the left of my oxygen mask on my left shoulder and knocked me back against Tyler. He thought I was hitting him and he shoved me back. I had felt two blows against my left side. I looked at my shoulder. My flak suit was torn and the metal was showing. I had been hit twice by bullets, one after the other, almost at once. I felt to see if I was okay. My flak suit wasn't. Metal plates on the left side were bent. The bullets had hit and glanced upward over my shoulder, knocking me against Tyler.

Tyler and I were always bumping our hind quarters against each other when we were doing a lot of shooting. Tyler said on the intercom, "Robbie." I turned and looked at him. The left pant leg

on his fleece-lined suit was ripped from his shoe top to just below his hip. Tyler was trying to inspect his leg.

There was a large hole in the bottom of the airplane between Tyler and me. I looked up. The ceiling had a hole in it above our heads. Several 20 mm shells had come through the bottom, grazed Tyler and gone out the top of the ship. Tyler separated his cut pant leg and got down to his skin. I saw a red streak, a cut up the calf and back of his leg. A trickle of blood ran down it and it looked like it was freezing. Tyler wiped off the blood with his glove. There seemed to be only a long deep scratch on his leg.

Tyler tried to cover his leg. "I'm okay," he said. When I first saw Tyler I was sure that his leg was not going to be there. I turned back to my waist window, trying to hold up my flak suit on my left shoulder. It was beginning to hang loose from the damage. I looked out the window and the Me 109s were coming back toward us in another V formation, all firing at the same time. They passed right over the top of us. I thought they were going to come through the waist window.

Everyone had stopped firing. Cook, Wittman, Dabbs, Cross, Tyler and I had nothing else to fire. There was no ammunition left at any of the gun positions. There was nothing else we could do. No one could help us. I looked out the window and prayed aloud, "God help us. If this is the end, take care of Elizabeth."

Something told me not to be afraid.

A voice inside of me said, "I have told you that I am with you."

I looked back at my ammunition rack. I had six bullets left in the rack. They had come loose from the belt. There was nothing else to do but stand there now and look out the window and wait. As I stood there watching the fighters coming at me, I saw the dingy radio beside me on the floor by the window puff up and then puff up again. It was about two feet from me, strapped to the floor. Two 20 mm shells had exploded in it, one after another.

Dabbs said on the intercom, "Robbie, I've been hit." I tried to walk back to see if I could help him. The hydraulic accumulators for the tail turret had received a hit and had ruptured. Red, warm hydraulic fluid had hit Dabbs in the back of the neck and head. As I tried to get back to my position, 20 mm shells hit in Dabbs flight bag that lay on the floor in front of me, as I was ready to step over it. I got back to my position and plugged in my intercom and told Dabbs



Fighters descend from Cross of Light.

what had happened. "You're covered with red hydraulic fluid, not blood." I could see that he was relieved. He had thought it was blood all over his back. I began to see holes forming in the ship all around the waist window. I watched the bullets in slow motion come through the skin of the ship.

Inside of the ship, in the center bulkhead there were bullet holes behind the ball turret. I could hear Wright on the intercom, crying out for help over the radio, talking to our fighters a long way off.

There was nothing to do now but to wait for the German fighters to shoot us down. My thoughts again turned to God, asking Him to take care of Elizabeth.

The fighters kept forming in V formations and passing back by us. There were only three B-24s in the formation left out of the nine B-24s that were with us before the fighters struck. It would be only a matter of time now. The German fighters were just using us for target practice.

## The Miracle

Cook in the top turret called out on the intercom, "Look at 2 o'clock!" I turned toward Tyler's waist window and he was pointing up. "Look! Look!" he was saying in a strange voice on the intercom. As I looked over Tyler's shoulder at 2 o'clock I felt a cold chill run through my body at what I was seeing.

The sun's rays were shining down in brilliant streaks through a hole in the cloud. In a bright clearing in the clouds, there was the shape of a cross and it was glowing around its edges. From the center of the cross came, first one, then another, and with more following, gleaming P-38s. They came slanting out of the sun rays, heading for the German Me 109s. Now they were pouring through the center of the cross and sliding down the sun rays through the cloud cover.

This was the most beautiful sight that I had ever seen. Words could not express my feeling. God was surely standing beside me. The voice had told me not to fear. Everyone became quiet. Tears were coming from my eyes and freezing on my mask and goggles.

The P-38s were on the tails of the Me 109s and, in seconds, German fighters were going down through the clouds everywhere

that you could look. They were like match sticks lighting in front of the P-38s. I asked Tyler, "Did you see the sun shining through the cross in the clouds?" Tyler said, "I saw a cross up there in the clouds above us." God had answered my prayer, and I am sure the rest of the crew had been praying, too.

I began to look over the aircraft to see what we had left and how airworthy we were. Tennessee Dotty had taken a beating. In the bomb bay the hydraulic tank was ruptured. The hydraulic pump had been shot away. There were bullet holes in both sides of the bomb bay and through both bomb bay doors.

A steel bullet was stuck in the support column holding the ball turret suspended from the roof. It had been heading straight for my body when it hit the four-inch thick metal column. It would have struck me in the right side of my back if it had not hit the column.

The floor of the waist had a hole you could put your hand through, between where Tyler and I stood. Between the waist windows and the tail, there were bullet holes everywhere you looked. There were bullet holes in Dabbs' A-3 bag, in the emergency radio, and in the accumulators at the tail turret. There were bullet holes through the tail on both sides. The nose turret had holes in the Plexiglas. There were holes in the window by the copilot and in the left side of my flak suit. We were in one hell of a mess but we were still flying.

I counted the airplanes remaining of the original nine. There were three of us still flying. What a ragged looking three we were. The P-38s were now all around us. Two had their flaps down and were flying along beside us. The two P-38s stayed beside us all the way back to the airfield. When we got to our airfield the two P-38s flew over us twice, peeled off and tipped their wings to say, "Have a good landing."

I went up to the flight deck and helped to crank down our nose wheel and landing gears. The tires looked okay and we were able to get the gears down and locked. We were unable to get the flaps down. Wright said, "I'll try to land without them." We didn't have brakes so he would have to drag the tail. Wright said, "Everyone move into the waist or tail. I want the tail to stay on the ground and drag. It'll help slow us down."

Wright descended as shallow as possible to keep from having so much air speed. The airplane touched down at about one hundred miles per hour. The tail started dragging as we went down the runway. I was at the waist window. I looked under my feet and

could see sparks and airplane skin peeling off the bottom of the aircraft. The airplane began to slow down some. The aluminum began tearing away in big pieces from the bottom under me and sparks were everywhere.

As I watched the metal coming loose, I said to myself, "The heck with this." Out the window I went! I hit the ground and rolled. I felt like the breath had been knocked out of me. While I was rolling, I saw someone else coming out of the waist window behind me. It was Cross.

The airplane continued on its way down the runway with the rest of the crew jumping out of it. The airplane passed the end of the runway and slid into the mud and came to a stop near a line of bushes and a fence. We were all standing up and looked okay when the truck came to pick us up. The medics took Tyler on to the hospital to look at his leg.

The airplane just sat there at the end of the runway in the mud. This was one airplane that was going to take a while to patch up.

As Cross and I were walking into debriefing, I told Cross that I would confirm his hits that I saw. Cross said, "Robbie, that was really a kill when you hit that Me 109 coming straight in at 9 o'clock. I believe he was trying to fly into us." I said, "When he was falling apart in front of me, I felt that time was standing still. I could see the airplane in slow motion, bit by bit coming apart. The pilot looked at me with his oxygen mask on, just before the fuselage blew into little pieces. That staggered me. I really don't think that I am going to say anything about me hitting the Me 109." Cross said, "Robbie, claim the kill. They want to know the truth. I am going to tell them about it anyway, and so will everyone on the other ships that saw it. They will say something about it, too." "Cross," I said, "this killing has been so remote to me up until now. It got personal while I was destroying another living person."

While I was leaning against the wall, waiting for the debriefing officer, I began to think about my twelfth birthday, when I got my first BB rifle. It was so shiny and pretty. In a few days, I went to the woods and started looking for something to shoot.

I looked up into a tree and saw a bird. I aimed the BB rifle at the bird and fired. To my surprise, the little bird fell from the tree. A moment of happiness hit me, to know that I could hit something. I walked over to the bird lying on the ground and picked it up. I put my rifle on the ground and held the bird in my hand. The little robin was still warm and so pretty. I could see that

I had hit the little bird in the head. While I was holding it, the bird lifted its head, looked at me and then I felt it die. As I held the little bird, I realized for the first time what it was like to kill one of God's creations.

I sat down on the ground, holding the little bird, with tears running down my face.

I stood daydreaming about the little bird.

Suddenly, I heard, "Come on, Robbie. The debriefing officer is ready for us." As I walked to the table to sit down, I thought, "Now I have to tell about shooting down a big bird with one of God's creations in it." I'm glad I didn't have to hold this creation in my hand today, as I had the bird, even though this creation had been trying to destroy me.

We each told the debriefing office what had taken place, as we had seen it and lived it.

Our crew accounted for seven enemy aircraft confirmed shot down. The other two B-24s had shot down several fighters. I had seen two fighters that one B-24 had shot down. There were sixteen fighters finally confirmed after the three crews had been debriefed. The P-38s had taken so many down that no one could have counted or kept up with the number.

During debriefing, we learned that, of the nine airplanes that went under the clouds, eight had stayed with us. One dropped out just as the fighters struck and returned to base.

The German fighters had taken five of us down with three of us surviving. We had lived through fifty minutes of fighter attacks, the longest fifty minutes that I had ever spent in my life. God was the only thing that could have opened the clouds in that solid overcast and let the P-38s find us. The P-38 pilots said, on the way back, "We could hear you on our radios but we couldn't find you, at first."

This twenty-second mission on April 12, was more than five hours and fifteen minutes long. I was sure that I would never forget this mission as long as I lived.

Time had stood still.

As I changed my flight gear in the locker room, I suddenly felt so tired that I was near the point of passing out, right there in the locker room.

I thought, "This is nothing but plain old fear beginning to set in."

I leaned against the locker to hold myself up.

It was several minutes before I was able to walk.

## Elizabeth, I Am Still With You

I finally made it back to the hut. Henry Parkhurst was waiting for me. Henry said, "I wanted to see with my own eyes if you had made it back. I saw your ship and didn't believe anyone could have been inside without being shot up." "Henry," I said, "let's talk about it later. I'm going to hit the bunk. I can't go any more today." Henry said, "I'll see you tomorrow, old buddy," and he left the hut. I hit the bunk and that was it for me. As I lay there, sinking into sleep, I was thanking God for being there.

I said, "Elizabeth, I am still with you."

The next day, I was presented a third Oak Leaf Cluster for my Air Medal, in a formal formation awards ceremony with some other flyers, near the flag pole outside our headquarters.

Cook, Cross, Dabbs and I went to the hangar and looked over our airplane and the guns. The tail turret guns couldn't be taken out of their jackets. They had melted. The barrels were bowed. My gun barrel had melted at the end. The ball turret gun barrels had melted as had the top turret. They had been fired so long and continuously.

The engines had not received any visible damage. The rest of the plane had been savaged by the repeated attacks by the German fighters.

I said, "Cross, let's get out of here. I have seen enough." We walked back to the barracks.

Tyler was back from the hospital when we got back to the hut. His leg was painted up with medicine, from his ankle to his hind end. He said he was all right.

"They had to treat the scratches to keep down any possible infection," Tyler said. "They said they didn't know what might have been on the bullets that scratched me."

During the next few days, we received a reprieve on flying missions. They let us rest. It was nice to be around the hut and just be alive. Knowing that you were alive meant everything. The weather was beautiful. Little things like walking through the field to the mess hall seemed wonderful. Sitting outside on the coal box in the warm sun and seeing a bird.

## Stewart Scares Tower Operators

While walking around the base near the photo lab, I ran into Lieutenant Shay who had flown with Jimmy Stewart many times in the lead. I asked him where Stewart was stationed.

I asked, "Have you heard from him lately?"

He said, "They finally moved Jimmy out to Division Headquarters. It's a desk job. That's all I know."

He smiled. "Except, on one of his first few days over at the new place, he got a B-24 to shoot some landings. Instead, for some reason, he started buzzing the tower - and he kept buzzing it until he ran everybody out and down the ladder. Oh, they called him on the carpet for that. He is really a great guy."

We both looked up in the sky. There was a huge formation of B-17s coming in across the sky in one direction. Coming across the airfield, moving in a path ninety degrees from the path of the B-17s, was a huge formation of B-24s. Both appeared to be flying at the same elevation.

The sky was full of airplanes and they were on a collision course.

Lieutenant Shay said, "My God, they're going to cross each other at the same altitude. My God! Look!"

The two of us got up on top of a hut where we could see. I watched the first few B-24s and B-17s crossing through each other, weaving.

Then it happened. It had to.

A B-24 and a B-17 hit each other and ruptured into flames and fell out of the sky. Lieutenant Shay had his camera. He got a picture at the moment they hit and several pictures of the falling parts of the two bombers. A tail section fell about a quarter of a mile from us. A front section hit just on the other side of it. The concussion blew Lieutenant Shay and me off the top of the hut. I got up and started running to the area where the parts had fallen.

As I crossed the fence, going to the crash area, I saw an airman get out of the tail section that had fallen out of the sky. It was unbelievable. He got up! Apparently unharmed! He ran toward the nose section of his airplane, probably to help his crew. As he approached, the larger section exploded again and the airman vanished in the fire ball. I never saw him again. The concussion knocked me to ground. When I picked myself up, trucks and ambulances were rushing into the area. I stood and watched.

Then I turned and walked back to the hut. Everything had been going so peacefully - then this. Twenty men dead in twenty seconds. Then the brief miracle of seeing one of the airmen survive the fall from high altitude - and run back into the explosion! I could see it over and over again in my mind.

On April 20, I was out again on my twenty-third mission. Our target for the day was Wisernes, in the Pas-de-Calais area of France - the rocket coast again. Our airplane was loaded with 8,000 pounds of general purpose bombs.

Our takeoff was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It looked as if someone had looked out the window and said, "Say, the weather is good. Let's get in a mission before the sun goes down." I kept thinking, "Why so late in the day?"

The group sent out twenty-six aircraft. As we formed, I kept thinking of the two bomber formations that crossed each other's path yesterday.

We crossed the English Channel and were flying at 21,000 feet. The temperature was twenty-three below zero. The formation was making nice big con trails and everything was quiet.

Suddenly, flak began bursting everywhere. It came all at once. It was under us, on each side of our plane, and above us. It was bouncing our plane around. Whatever the Germans had down there, they were making an effort to keep it. The B-24 on our right wing received a direct flak hit. Tyler said, "Our wing man is going down." I turned and looked. Tyler was pointing at it dropping away. We reached our IP and soon opened the bomb bays and dropped the bomb load. I could see only bomb craters on the ground and our bombs were making plenty more. I couldn't help but think, "Why hit an area like this? I don't see anything to hit but bomb craters." We had been told that the Germans had rockets everywhere along here. I sure didn't see them but they must be down there, the way the flak was coming up.

Tyler and I were throwing chaff as fast as we could. It looked like the rear of the formation was really getting the worst of it now. Dabbs, from his tail gunner spot, called out on the intercom, "B-24 behind us got a direct flak hit. Going down." This was the second one in just a few minutes. Dabbs called out again, "My God! There goes another B-24. For God sake, get us out of this stuff!" That was my thoughts exactly: "Get us out of here!" The bursts were going, *karup, karup*. The cordite smell was strong in the waist of the airplane.

I looked out the window and saw our number one engine being feathered. The prop came to a stop. I said on the intercom, "Wright, what is wrong with the number one engine?" Wright said, "Oil pressure gone. Temperature up. Can you see anything? Do we have a fire?" I looked out my waist window at the engine and said, "I see nothing. Not even an oil slick." Tyler looked over my shoulder and said, "We don't see anything wrong."

Wright was staying in formation on the three good engines. The coastline wasn't very far in front of us now. I was wondering where our fighter protection was. I knew why the German fighters were not there. There was too much flak for them.

We were now dropping to a lower altitude and England was in front of us. We had fallen behind the formation but it wasn't very far ahead of us.

We were soon back at the air base. Flares were coming from most of the ships, indicating wounded aboard. Six of the planes landed before we did, even though we only had three engines running. Wright touched down after five hours of flying. On the ground and back at the hard stand, we saw that our number one engine had a flak hole in it. Oil was draining out of it.

I couldn't help from thinking, "Only two more missions to go. Twenty-three missions in." Back at the hut, I could hardly wait to write Elizabeth and tell her that I only had two more missions to complete my tour.

## German Fighters Trail Us Through Darkness

April 22 looked like it was going to be a nice day. I thought I would catch up on my diary, and read some of Elizabeth's letters again. When noon came, we were told that Wright's crew was scheduled to fly a mission that afternoon. I couldn't believe it. "What in God's world is Division doing, sending us out in the afternoon?" I wondered.

The rumor was that General Doolittle was trying to make a name for himself by having the Eighth Air Force fly two missions every day over Germany - if manpower lasted long enough.

Everyone was complaining at the briefing. Wright got there on time, it being so late in the day.

Our target was to be Hamm, Germany. A secondary target would be Koblenz, across the river from Hamm. Our airplane was

loaded with 5,200 pounds of incendiaries and general purpose bombs. After briefing, we were sitting under the wing of the airplane, waiting for the time of takeoff. Wright talked about how deep into Germany this trip was going to be and how late we would be getting back. "We're going into the Ruhr valley," he said.

The airplane was so full of boxes of chaff that we could hardly get into the waist. Tyler said, "How in the world are we going to get rid of all that chaff?" I was thinking the same thing. Wright lifted off the runway at 1630 hours. We formed over England and crossed the channel. When we entered the enemy coast there was only a little flak. Our fighter protection was with us in strength. The P-51s and P-38s were in every direction that you looked. Flak was only spotty on the way to the target. Tyler and I started throwing chaff along the way whenever we saw a little flak in front of us. Just to have something to do. We sure had plenty of chaff to be tossed out.

We were getting close to our IP. The bomb bays soon came open. We were now over the Ruhr Valley. Flak was everywhere. Tyler and I threw chaff as fast as we could.

In front of us, B-17s were crossing our path. They were dropping their bombs on Hamm. The smoke coming from the city was so heavy it was blacking out our target area. Flak was bursting everywhere. I told Tyler on the intercom, "I believe this chaff stuff is attracting this damned flak." We started throwing it out in full boxes.

Our formation passed over the heavy smoke area, trying to stay out of the way of the B-17s. We had to turn to the left before we could drop our bombs.

I asked Wright on the intercom, "Why are we not dropping bombs?" Wright said, "We are going to drop on the secondary target, Koblenz. The damned B-17s have messed up our bomb run on Hamm. We can't see our target because of the smoke."

"My God!" I thought, "We will never get out of this flak." It was bursting between our wing and tail, bouncing the plane around. I had seen accurate flak before but this was bursting in my face. The flak was bursting just above our wings.

Everywhere I looked, another B-17 was going down. The B-17s were a little lower than we were and they were getting direct hits. There were so many going down that I couldn't count them. The sky was full of them falling. I could see parachutes drifting everywhere between the black flak puffs. I thought, "How can anyone live, parachuting through so many flak bursts?"

Our secondary target wasn't far from Hamm. Koblenz was built on a bend of a river. Wittman dropped the bombs and I watched them hit in the middle of a railroad yard with trains all over the yards. There was very little flak coming up from Koblenz, compared with Hamm.

The sun was going down in front of us as we left the target. The ground below was already getting dark. I could see small arms fire coming from the ground everywhere. I had never realized that there was so much small arms fire coming up at us. It was all falling off at about 10,000 feet. They were throwing everything they had at us. Everyone on the ground must have something to shoot at us.

This was the first time that I had seen Germany in the darkness. The tracers from the ground even looked pretty, making a path through the sky toward us in the dark.

A group of A-26 low-level bombers were bombing an airfield and its hangars from low altitude, out to our left, not far from the coastline. The concussion rings looked different at night. The fireworks were spectacular. Fires were burning everywhere around the field.

Not far out from us, at 9 o'clock, all by itself, was a strange looking B-24. As we began to cross the enemy coastline, the strange B-24 turned back into Germany. I said on the intercom, "A strange B-24 is turning back to Germany." Tyler was looking at it over my shoulder. He said, mystified, "That's nuts."

At a very low altitude a fighter blew up. I couldn't identify it.

The sky was full of B-24s. It was now getting so dark that it was getting hard to see. I could see some Me 109s out from us. They were following us. Our fighter protection was gone. The other B-24s were turning their running lights on. Wright turned ours on. It didn't help much for we were not equipped for night flying. I looked back. The German fighter planes were still following us.

As we approached the English coast, flak began to come up. Wright said on the intercom, "My God, what is wrong with the damned Limeys? They are shooting at us."

The flak got heavy as we crossed the English coast. I said, "Alexander, are we over England?" He said, "Hell, yes. And they're shooting at us!" Wright was trying to find our airfield. We were at about 5,000 feet and an Me 109 passed my window, firing at us as he came up from our rear. I called out, "Enemy fighters are

with us." I got off a burst at him as he was leaving under our left wing. At that moment a B-24 blew up out at 9 o'clock. I could see gunfire coming out of the dark behind him. I kept saying, "Enemy fighters in our formation. They are with us in the formation."

Wright turned off our running lights. "You're going to land without lights?" Buckey Kroll asked. Wright said, "I'd rather try to land without lights than give them some landing lights to shoot at!"

Returning bombers seemed afraid to land. As soon as a B-24 would make an approach and turn on his lights, a German fighter would come out of nowhere and start shooting at him and fly on across the field at low level and disappear in the dark.

All but the ball turret gunner in Tennessee Dotty were in their gun positions while we waited to land. Dabbs took shots at something.

We could see some small outline lights on the field and part of the runway. Wright said, "There is no landing pattern. Everyone is everywhere. Hang on." Wright started down on an approach. Another B-24 showed up close behind us on approach. As we were on final approach at the end of the runway Wright turned on our landing lights for a second and then turned them off. He had to make sure there was a runway in front of us. After he turned off our landing lights, twenty mm shells zipped over our top, and two Me 109s flew over us, within a few feet of us, and went on down the runway, shooting.

Wright touched down and got the airplane off the runway as quickly as he could. The B-24 behind us was so close when we touched down that I could hear him coming in behind us. He was landing by following our lights in. I will never know how Wright found the runway. I could not see it on approach. On the ground we taxied to the hard stand through the dark. Our crew chief used a small flashlight to help guide Wright into parking position on the hard stand.

When the engines stopped, Wright said, "Let's all get away from the ship until this thing is over." We all got out and ran over to a gun placement, and sat there for a while. Wright said, "I hope Doolittle got his money's worth tonight." We were blaming everything on Doolittle. Before he took over the Eighth Air Force, we were not doing things like flying at night without any night flying equipment. As we sat there in the dark, I thought, "We have never had to fight Germans over our own base before. They have a lot of fight left in them yet."

## The Bad News

Our truck picked us up and took us straight to debriefing. German fighters were still making low level passes across the airfield. In the distance, there were many glows of fires coming from some of the neighboring airfields. The debriefing officer couldn't explain why we were sent out so late that we came back long after darkness. We had landed at 10:15 p.m., well after the blackout. This was the first time that German fighter planes had been waiting for us over our own field as well as over our targets in Europe. I asked why the English were shooting at us. He said, "There was an unidentified aircraft in the sky with you. They were firing because of their automatic detection system."

I remembered the strange looking B-24 that flew near us a while, then turned back into France.

He said German fighter planes had knocked down two of our bombers as they came in to land.

I was safely back from my twenty-fourth mission. It was hard to believe that I only had one more to go.

The next day, we were told to report to a general briefing. All crews from our squadron were to attend. This would be the first time I had seen our new squadron commander, Major Maurice Casey. He was quite a contrast to Jimmy Stewart - being on the heavy side and much shorter. Of course, everyone was shorter than Jimmy Stewart. I was sitting there thinking that I didn't like him. I didn't know why. He looked like he thought he was too important. I didn't even know him but I was forming an opinion about him. In fact, at that moment I didn't really like anybody. I was still thinking about yesterday's raid and how it was goofed.

When everyone had arrived, the operations officer tried to explain yesterday's mission, and how two missions a day would wear the Germans down. I thought, "That's a lot of bull. Look what they did to us yesterday."

Major Casey rose and said he had some news for us. "Everyone will be flying thirty missions instead of twenty-five," he said. "Also it will now take six missions, instead of five, to earn an Air Medal. This will become effective as of now."

I knew from the start that I didn't like this SOB. It was about all I could do to keep from shooting him.

"My God!" I said to Wright. "We only had one more mission to fly to complete our tour and go home. Now we have six more."

Wright said, "This is for the birds. I am going to look into this if I can find someone to talk to."

Everyone in the room started grumbling aloud. They looked about ready to fight. The meeting was dismissed.

The officers who had been on the stage had left.

As I walked back to the hut with Cross, he said, "Well, look at it this way: I had four more than you to go. Now I have to make ten but you only have to make six to be through."

It didn't really get to me until I got back to the hut and was trying to write and tell Elizabeth. I put my writing pad down.

I just didn't care about anything.

I was thinking: "Why not just go on and get killed, and get this thing over with?"

"I will never finish now. How the hell can I?"

I walked around outside, trying to make myself think that life was worth living.

I kept saying, "God! What are you doing to me?"

Something kept saying to me, "You are going to make it. What is wrong with you? Don't you believe in me?"

I found myself out by the airplane.

I had walked all the way out there by myself and didn't realize it.

I looked at the airplane and was counting the holes from yesterday's raid. The ground crew was patching some of them. There were more than seventy-five flak holes and some 20 mm shell holes in the ship, yet none of us had been seriously hurt. I knew that only God in heaven could manage that.

After counting and seeing the holes in the ship, I walked back to the hut. I was feeling somewhat better inside of me. I sat down on the bunk and wrote Elizabeth that there would be a delay in me coming home.

On April 24 I found myself making my twenty-fifth mission. This should have been the last, I kept thinking, all through briefing.

Wright was very late getting to briefing. When he walked in it was about half over.

I wasn't the only one who was feeling the shock of having to go five extra missions.

## Augsburg, Germany, Number Twenty-five

"Our target for today will be Gablingen, Germany, just outside of Augsburg," the briefing officer said, pulling the curtain back from the wall chart.

This was going to be a long trip into Southeast Germany.

The airplane that we would fly was a new silver B-24J. Tennessee Dotty was still being patched. All the new airplane replacements were now aluminum without any paint except for the marking and numbers. The white circle painted on the tail with a big black "F" inside was our group markings. The airplane was loaded with 5,200 pounds of incendiaries.

Buckey Kroll and Wright looked like they were really down in the dumps. Wittman and Alexander were the only ones who had anything much to say. The morale of the enlisted men seemed to be better than that of the officers. Everyone was taking this thirty mission thing hard.

I took some extra K rations and carbohydrate rations with me because the flight to Gablingen was going to be a long one with plenty of time for the German fighters and anti-aircraft gunners to take shots at us. The flare went up from the tower. Wright lifted off at 0900 hours. It didn't take us long to form in the clear sky. The weather was perfect. You could see for miles. As we crossed the North Sea our fighter protection was already with us. The enemy coast came into view but there was no flak coming up in front of us. Our fighter protection was already turning back and more P-38s and P-51s were showing up to take their place. They were doing a good job of staying with the formation.

There was a line of B-24s and B-17s as far back as the eye could see. Flak was becoming spotty along the way to the target. None of it was very near us. Our group had sent out twenty-four airplanes and they were all still in the formation. None had turned back. Cross called out, "Fighters, low on the ground, almost under us. Enemy fighters low under us." Our fighter protection had seen them and some of the P-51s were going down to get them.

After two of our group's B-24s had turned back, we were finally reaching our IP. In a few minutes, the flak was bursting right with us, and was heavy in front of us. I could see our target. It was an airfield. Bomb bay doors came open and in a few moments the bombs dropped out. Then the bomb bay doors closed.

I watched the bombs fall all the way down. They were making good hits on the airfield and buildings. Almost a bull's eye. Flak was bursting just above our altitude, and was very concentrated. Flak bursts were almost side by side but we were flying under it. Again I thanked God. The flak was so concentrated that if it had been exploding at our altitude, we would have never made it through.

As we left the target area I could see the Alp Mountains with their pointed snow tops. They were visible for miles.

Enemy fighters were low to the ground. They were like little dots moving. Everyone was watching them. It looked like they didn't want to come up to the bombers with all the fighter protection we had around us.

The P-51s were now dropping their fuel tanks, and were beginning to go back. Some of the P-38s had already turned back.

Wright called out on the intercom, "Fighters coming in front of me at 12 o'clock. Coming through on our left side. Here they come. Fighters at 11 o'clock!" The nose turret began shooting along with the top turret. Wright said, "Robbie, you got one coming right by your window. Here he comes from 12 o'clock. Just under our left wing. Here he comes."

Buckey yelled, "Here he comes! Get him!"

I saw him coming in front and under our left wing, not more than twenty-five feet from me. I depressed my gun as low as possible, shooting all the time. He was below my gun sight and my gun was hitting the top of the gun mount. I could see the pilot looking at me. Cross said that he was too high and too close for him to get a good shot at him. The German pilot had flown just between our lines of fire. His flight path was just right for him. If he had been up or down a foot or two, he would have been in our fire pattern at the end of our guns.

Wright said, "Why didn't you tell me to drop the left wing?" Buckey said, "Robbie, how could you have missed him?" I said, "I couldn't get my gun low enough." Buckey couldn't understand and I wasn't going to try to explain through this damned throat mike.

The Me 109s made several frontal attacks and each time they passed by me so fast that I couldn't get a pattern of bullets in front of them. I knew that some of my bullets were hitting but it was as if they were bouncing off as the fighters went by.

Wright said, "B-24 going down in front of us. Going straight down." I watched it go down and hit the ground. It was one of our group's ships and no one came out of it.

The P-38s were now beginning to arrive and the Me 109s started pulling away.

With all the protective P-38s out there, the trip began to get dull and tiresome. We just watched for every dot in the sky or near the ground. Looking for anything that moved.

A group of B-17s were out to our left at 9 o'clock as we were passing them. Suddenly, for no reason at all, one of the B-17s just blew up as it flew along in the formation.

Flak was beginning to burst around us as we neared the coastline. We were still at 23,000 thousand feet. Our lead aircraft tried to miss the flak in front of us by just dropping suddenly. Wright tried to follow him down. The sudden drop picked me up from the floor. We did go under the flak but we lost 8,000 feet doing it. Wright yelled on the intercom, "What is that guy trying to do? Get us all killed? It was a wonder that I didn't hit him when he just dropped down in front of me like that." The formation behind us had all stayed with the drop.

Buckey said, "Well, that got us out of the flak but I think the plunge ruptured my ear drum again. It's starting to hurt me. It seems to be both ears this time." All the way back, Lieutenant Kroll complained about his ears. He told Wright to take it easy letting down, even if we had to get out of the formation. He said his ears were hurting so bad that he couldn't stand it.

Wright sat down at the airfield after eight hours and forty-five minutes of flight time.

Wright stopped the airplane just off the end of the runway and the medics took Kroll on to the hospital. We then continued to taxi to the hard stand. I knew that we had lost at least one ship today for I saw it hit the ground.

I looked around the airplane. We only had two little holes in our nice new silver airplane.

As we were waiting for the truck to go to debriefing, Wright announced "I am not going to fly anymore."

We all stopped what we were doing and looked at him.

Lieutenant Wittman told Wright, in pretty blunt, barracks language, "Sure, you will."

Harsh words were said. They started yelling.

Wright started to swing a fist at Wittman.

Cook and I jumped in and stopped him. "Calm down," I said. "Calm down."

The operations officer showed up while we were holding Wright. We let him go. The operations officer told Wright to get in the Jeep with him and they drove off together.

Wright didn't look back.

We watched him leaving. We really didn't know what to think.

We all felt a deadly fatigue. It looked like Wright's nerves were getting to him.

The only good thing was that I had finished another mission, my twenty-fifth, safe and sound. When we got to debriefing, we were told that Wright had been taken to the hospital. We were beginning to wonder how this was going to affect us in finishing our missions. I now had only five more to go, unless they changed that number before I got through.

I blamed it on the Eighth Air Force Commander, General Doolittle. They said he was only a glory seeker, anyway. I really had no reason to believe this rumor. I thought, "I guess this is just another way to win the war: use everything you have available."

Back at the hut, we were all talking about Wright and Buckey. Wright's problem was beginning to shake us all up. I was really getting worried about how I was going to finish up my missions.

The next day, we all went to see Wright and Kroll. At the hospital they wouldn't let us see Wright for some reason. We did visit with Kroll. He said his ears and head were giving him a fit. The doctors were going to do something to try to close his ear drums the next day. Both of his drums were ruptured. One had been ruptured before.

Several missions back, Buckey had ruptured one of his ear drums when we dropped over 15,000 feet all at once.

"Will you be able to fly again?" I asked him.

"I don't know if I will or not," Buckey said.

This wasn't very good news to us. We all liked Buckey a lot. He was a good co-pilot and he always had something good to say about everything and he was always very friendly.

On April 26, early in the morning, the squadron commander came into the hut. Major Casey told us he wanted everyone in the squadron to participate in a calisthenics program every afternoon. Dabbs looked up from between his blankets on his bunk and said, "You must be out of your mind." The major turned and walked out.

Cross said, "If that guy don't want to get his ass shot off, he'd better not start that kind of stuff around here." It was only the second time we had ever seen him. We hardly knew who he was.

The afternoon came and went, and there was no calisthenics program. We thought that the new commander had met more opposition than just ours in the squadron. I had about reached a state of feeling that no one was going to tell me to do anything. I was just going to finish my missions somehow. That was the only thing in my mind and I didn't want anyone in my way.

When we went to the mess hall that evening, it was full of new faces. New crews were arriving every day now. I resented having to stand in line to eat again. For so long, I had been able to just walk in and eat whenever I wanted to. Now there was a schedule being posted on the mess hall board.

I asked Cross, "Did we ever look as green as these new guys?" Their uniforms were pressed and new. Smiles were on their faces. They were cocky and full of bull. Cross said, "I don't think so. These guys now have a good base to live in. We had to help make it livable when we came here. Just wait until they have a few German fighters on their ass. Then look at them."

## Chalons, France

On April 27, Cross was called to fly a mission. He returned shortly before noon. He was back before I got out of the sack. Cross told me that he had been to Mimoydeques, France, and everyone had returned. While we were all sitting around on the bunk, hearing about his mission, the hut door opened and in walked an officer.

"Lieutenant Wright's crew is scheduled to fly a mission this afternoon," he said. "Get dressed out as quickly as possible."

It was hard for me to believe that Group was sending out two missions in one day. Cross said that he would go again, that he had only had a ride today and it didn't seem much like a mission.

We all got to briefing as soon as we could. Our target would be Chalons-Sur-Marne, France. Kroll and Wright were still in the hospital. Alexander, our navigator, didn't show up. We would have had a full replacement for our officers except for Wittman who was still flying.

The briefing was short and we were soon out at the airplane. The ship was loaded with twelve, 500-pound general purpose bombs. As we sat under the wing of the airplane, our replacement officers showed up - pilot, co-pilot, and navigator. We all climbed into the plane.

The flare from the tower went up. Group was sending out twenty-six airplanes. I sure was hoping that we would be getting back before dark. I didn't want to go through that again, and bring home the German fighters with us. Our airplane lifted off at 3:30 in the afternoon. I could tell right away that we had a good pilot by the way he was flying. We had no trouble getting into formation. The weather was very good.

I kept thinking about Wright.

Wright thought that if he made another mission that he would get killed. "I'm just not going any more," he told us.

As we crossed the enemy coast there was no flak around us. There were a few spotty bursts, way off to our right.

I kept thinking about Wright and Buckey - wishing they were with us.

Our fighter protection was everywhere that you looked. We reached our IP and opened the bomb bay doors. Our target was a railroad yard.

I had hardly realized we had reached the target, while thinking about our crew, wondering where Alexander was. The only words spoken so far on the flight were when we crossed the channel: "Test fire your guns," the pilot said. As we approached the target, he said, "We have reached our IP."

The bombs were now dropping and I saw them hit in the middle of the railroad yards. There were all kinds of secondary explosions from the box cars that were in the rail yard. Smoke was coming up over 15,000 feet. The bomb bay doors closed and we were now on our way home. Our fighter protection still was good. There were P-51s in every direction that you looked.

Flak began to come up just as we were leaving the target. I could see it leaving the guns on the ground. It looked like they were shooting at a lower group of P-51 fighters. The fighters were going after the flak guns when one of the fighters received a direct hit. The fighter blew up just before the gun emplacements. The other three fighters made a pass over the flak guns. Another of the fighters exploded as he passed over the guns. Four more fighters had seen it and they went down and finished the job on the flak gun

installation. They destroyed the guns with pass after pass, like they were furious.

Heavy smoke was coming from the gun emplacement after the second group of fighters made their pass across the guns. We had no flak over the target and no enemy aircraft attacks.

We sat back down at the base after five hours and thirty minutes. All of the ships that the group had sent out were back. There wasn't much to tell at debriefing. My twenty-sixth mission was now completed. I only had four more to go. I was back to where I was some time ago. Cross, Dabbs, and Tyler had five more to go. Cook and Van Bogelen had two more to go.

We were all kind of screwed up now.

We just wanted to get through with this mission stuff. The pilot and co-pilot today were very friendly to us. They were about at the end of their tour.

## Brunswick, Germany

More new crews were arriving every day. New silver B-24-Js were arriving. New airplanes were filling up the vacant hard stands. I thought, "With all the new crews coming in, and we don't have a crew. They could keep me here forever, trying to make thirty missions." I was becoming numb to flying missions. Self-preservation didn't enter into the picture anymore. I just wanted to make missions and get through.

Everything was getting screwed up.

The next few days were hell to get through. The group had flown six missions and none of us had been allowed to fly any of them. Cross and I went to operations, trying to see what we could do about it.

On May 5, I was finally back in briefing. Our target was to be Brunswick, Germany. I didn't even know who I was going to fly with. I was assigned to fly as first engineer in the top turret gun position. I met the pilot and co-pilot at the airplane and they were very nice to me. I had everything ready when they arrived. Loading and balance, forms all signed. We were ready to go. The flare went up and we taxied out and got in line for takeoff. Just before we turned on the runway, I turned the putt-putt off. Then I went to the flight deck and kneeled between the pilot and co-pilot. Takeoff was going very well. We lifted off at 8 a.m. I secured the

fuel gauges and drained them, then took my position in the top turret.

That turret looked small and confined up there but you could see everything above you.

We formed without any trouble. The pilot and co-pilot worked well together. I didn't even know the crew members' last names. We all introduced ourselves by our first names only. In a strange way, it helped us keep a sense of privacy. We were calling each other by our positions. We flew out over the coastline and over the channel. The weather was good.

The pilot said, "We are getting a recall. Don't know why." Back to base we went. We didn't get any answers at debriefing except, "Division scrubbed the mission." We had been in the air three hours and twenty-five minutes. The debriefing officer smiled. "We'll just mark it up as a training flight. Right?"

When I got back to my hut, I told Cross all about the recalled mission and what happened. Cross said, "Well, here is some good news. You have lots of mail from home." He handed me a bunch of letters.

It was not until Sunday, May 7 that I was given another mission to fly. Cross, Van Bogelen, and Cook were making the trip, too. Cross and I were to fly with Lieutenant Driscoll and his crew. They needed two replacements. Our primary target was Brunswick, and our secondary target would be Munster, Germany.

The airplane was loaded with twelve, 500-pound general purpose bombs. The weather was good. Driscoll was a very good pilot. We had flown beside him in formations many times.

Driscoll lifted the ship off the runway at 0700 hours. We formed over England in good weather and headed out over the North Sea. We passed over a weather front.

Clouds covered all of Germany. I couldn't see the ground. We were flying at 23,000 feet. Our fighter escort was right with us. Everywhere you looked were P-47s, P-51s and P-38s. The P-47s showed up first. They also turned back first because they had the shortest range. Then the P-51s would show up and soon would drop their fuel tanks and turn back. Then the P-38s were with us. "Our fighters have this bomber escort service down pat," I thought.

As we reached our IP, flak was exploding in a solid black cloud in front of us. The bomb bay doors came open. We flew through the flak and didn't drop our bombs. The bomb bay doors closed. We flew on to our second target of Munster. Very soon, the bomb bay doors opened again. There was a flak wall in front of

us. Flak was coming up through the cloud overcast and bursting at our altitude. The bombs fell from the ship and we flew on through the flak. We had dropped on the city by using radar.

The trip back seemed to be uneventful. Fighter protection was all around us. Very little flak came out from the enemy coastline. I only saw flak over the two cities we flew above. Back at the airfield, after five hours and fifteen minutes of flying, I was unloading my gear at the hard stand and talking to the pilot about how good it felt to get the mission over with.

The debriefing officer said our group had sent out twenty-nine planes and two had not returned. They were reported downed by flak. None of us had seen them go down or even leave the formation.

On the way back to the hut, Cross and I talked about Wright and why he wouldn't fly.

"Today's mission would have been a perfect mission for Wright to fly," Cross said. "Everything went well for us. We're back, safe. We didn't get one hole in the airplane."

When we entered the hut, we found a new crew had moved in with us. The cots on the other side were all back in place and made up.

Our beer keg was gone.

I stood looking around the hut. I felt like some enemy had invaded our kingdom. "We have had the hut to ourselves so long, I felt like it was ours," I said to Cross. "Me, too," said Cross, looking around.

The crew was a new replacement crew. Their pilot was a Lieutenant Coverwell. Cross and I both said, "Hi!" We flopped on our bunks. The new crew seemed shy of us. Cook, Tyler, Dabbs and Van Bogelen came in later.

I could hear Tyler grumbling, "Damn. What is going on now? They can't leave anything alone." Before the afternoon passed we introduced ourselves. One of the crew members was from Memphis, Tennessee. Jack Carlisle was his name. I tried to talk to him about home but he didn't seem to be interested in talking. In fact, the whole crew seemed to have something wrong with them. Maybe they were all scared. They had not flown a mission yet and were still green. I thought, "Maybe I just don't speak their language."

We were resentful of having another crew in our barracks. Dabbs had already started an argument with one of the new crew over the stove and his missing beer keg. The next day, I was still

trying to accept the new roommates but the conversations just didn't seem to fit.

Their pilot, Coverwell, came by to see them and when he walked in, they all jumped up to attention. We couldn't believe it. None of us even moved or paid any attention to him. He said something about, "Don't you know an officer when you see one?" Dabbs nodded. "When I see one." He was holding his .45 automatic in his hand. Coverwell didn't say anything more.

After he left, I asked Jack Carlisle about him. Carlisle didn't have much to say about him. They had not been a crew very long and had not trained together. They all acted kind of cracked to me. Maybe we had been out of touch with military discipline too long, or something.

On May 9, I was scheduled to fly a mission. This would be my twenty-eighth mission. The briefings seemed to be getting more organized and more formal.

We were called to attention. The briefing officers would walk in and sit in front. I guess, with all the new crews, we were supposed to act like soldiers. We had always been so informal, almost like one big family. Now it seemed so automatic and mechanical: everything by the numbers. I thought, "I just don't fit among so many new strangers. Why, they don't even look like us."

They looked on us old air crews with envy, as though we were untouchables of some kind. Maybe we did have that "go to hell" look. We had been to hell often enough.

The target for today was Florennes, Belgium. This was the first time that I was going to drop bombs in Belgium. I was flying with a new pilot and crew. After briefing, I talked with them. They had a number of missions under their belt and seemed to know what they were doing. I made sure to satisfy myself about the airplane and the crew that I was going to fly with to Belgium.

At this stage of the game, I was going to do everything I could to get back. I wasn't going to go down due to crew error or a mechanical problem. This was my biggest concern now.

The airplane lifted from the runway at 6:30 a.m. with 4,100 pounds of general purpose bombs. Cross was flying the ball turret position. I helped him remove the arming wires from the bombs, and then returned to my position at the left waist window. The weather was very good and we were in formation in good time. The sky was full of B-24s and B-17s. Most of the B-24s were silver. There were very few old painted B-24s left now.

As we entered the coastline, a few spotty bursts of flak hit around the formation. Our fighter protection was out in full strength. Fighters were all around us. We reached our IP very soon after we crossed the enemy coastline. P-51s and P-47s were flying so near us it looked as if they were going to make the bomb run with us. The bomb bay doors opened. Our target was an airfield. We dropped our bombs on the drop of the lead airplane. I watched ours go down and hit alongside the airfield, in a number of buildings and hangars. The ships behind us hit right across the airfield. There was very little flak coming up at us. It looked like only four guns shooting at us from the ground. I could see their flashes. We left the target area and the bomb bay doors closed.

Our fighter protection had moved up to high altitude.

The nose gunner called out on the intercom, "Fighters coming in at 12 o'clock." Me 109s shot through the formation in single file. They went by my window, one after another. I was firing right into them. I could hear the ball turret firing down at them as they passed below us.

More fighters were on us before anyone saw them. Three passed under our left wing to hit the B-24s behind us. The tail gunner said, "B-24 going down behind us in our group. Me 109s still on his tail. He's falling." After a bit, he said, "He hit the ground. I never saw anyone get out."

Our fighter protection was coming down from high altitude now and heading for the Me 109s. There were more than thirty Me 109s

The P-51s were now heading into the large group of Me 109s. The fighters were beginning to dogfight all over the sky. I said on the intercom, "Two Me 109s hitting the ground at 7 o'clock. P-51s on their tail." The Me 109s exploded when they hit the ground. The P-51s came back up for more. As the Me 109s were being thinned down, the P-51s seemed to be fighting among themselves as to who would be next to shoot down an enemy fighter. One P-51 would fly over the other to get at an Me 109.

The weather was so clear that you could see everything that was happening, or all that the human brain could take in. After the P-51s had finished their job with the German fighters, they started returning to the B-24s formation. They stayed closer to us.

The temperature was twenty-two degrees below zero. My heated suit was still working. I had to remove ice from my oxygen mask hose.

As we left the enemy coastline there was very little flak. We crossed the channel and soon were back at our airfield. We sat down, five hours and five minutes after takeoff.

Back in debriefing, we all told our stories about what we had seen this day. The enemy fighters had seemed to be more determined to get to the bombers. They attacked even with our fighters just above us.

I changed out of my flight gear. Deep fatigue was beginning to set in. It was only a five-hour mission but it had worn me out.

It was 1400 hours when I got back to the hut.

Cook and Van Bogelen had flown with another crew. They were back from their thirtieth, their last, mission. They had made it. Their tour was over. We all went to the mess hall together and celebrated.

With a glass of water, Cross made a toast at the table to Van Bogelen and Cook.

I looked at a laughing Cook. I thought, "God has answered Cook's prayer, the one we prayed together one night out behind the hut during an air raid." Cook had finished - safe and sound.

The thought of someone actually completing their tour, and coming out of it alive, began to make me feel better.

It could really happen to some of us.

## Zeitz, Germany, Number Twenty-nine

Alexander had been the first of our crew to finish his thirty missions. We had not seen him since Wright stopped flying but we knew he had finished his two day ago.

I had two more missions to go. Cross and Dabbs had three more. This last group of five missions seemed to be the hardest to get through. The anxiety got worse.

The morning of May 11, we were called out to a full dress formation in front of headquarters. The colonel presented each of us with the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Cluster for our Air Medal. I now had an Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Now there were two rows of ribbons on my dress uniform with my European Theater of Operations ribbon and battle stars under my silver wings.

We were all beginning to be proud of them. We walked around the base with all the ribbons on so the new crews would take

notice of us. Now all I had to do was complete two more missions. Only two.

The next day, I was back in the briefing room and was assigned to fly as first engineer with Lieutenant Coverwell's crew. I was feeling uneasy about flying with them. This was their first mission. I talked to Jack Carlisle and their co-pilot and decided that I would fly with them.

We were allowed to pick our crew if there was a replacement needed.

Our target would be Zeitz, Germany, almost to the Czechoslovakian border. I thought, "I must be crazy, to go so deep into Germany with this being my twenty-ninth mission." I went ahead. I just wanted to finish as soon as I could.

I was held at briefing for a few extra minutes. Coverwell's crew left in the truck. When I was dismissed from briefing, I was taken to the hard stand in a Jeep. When I arrived, the crew was standing at attention beside the airplane and Lieutenant Coverwell was talking to them. I got out of the Jeep and climbed into the airplane and started checking it out. I signed the crew chief's form and ran the load and balance check for the center of gravity. We were loaded with 4,700 pounds of general purpose bombs. I checked all the fuel gauges and secured them, then started the auxiliary power plant.

The crew finally loaded their gear and got ready to go. Coverwell took the check list from me and the co-pilot called off the check list procedure. I repeated it after him. Coverwell would confirm. I was sitting on the jump seat, a strap between the pilot and co-pilot seats. The flare from the tower went up. Coverwell started the engines. We were late to taxi to the ramp from the hard stand. We would be the last to take off. Twenty-six airplanes were going out.

Only six airplanes had lifted off. We were going to have a long wait on the perimeter ramp. Lieutenant Coverwell told me to cut the auxiliary power putt-putt off. I said I thought we were too far from takeoff and we would run our batteries down without the help of the auxiliary.

He said, "God damn it! I said cut the thing off. It makes too damn much noise."

I told him that we were in a B-24-J. I said, "This ship has electronic supercharger regulators and we won't have power on takeoff if we don't have full battery power."

Coverwell said, "Are you questioning me?"

I said, "No, sir."

I went down and turned the putt-putt off.

I went back to my position. I wanted to tell Coverwell that I wanted off this damned ship. We sat on the ramp for more than an hour with the engines hardly turning. I looked at Coverwell. "This guy is nuts," I thought.

When we finally got to the runway, Coverwell swung around and pushed full power, all at once. The co-pilot started calling out speed as we rolled down the runway. I knew we couldn't lift off. Coverwell already had the throttles at full emergency power

The co-pilot grabbed the throttles and pulled them back. I put my hand on top of his and helped him pull back. The co-pilot was applying all the brakes we had.

The brakes were squealing. All I could see was the end of the runway coming up. The co-pilot managed to turn onto the ramp. Then Coverwell taxied the airplane back to the hard stand, not saying anything.

The operations officer was waiting for us at the hard stand. I jumped out of the ship through the open bomb bay doors. Major Wright, the operations officer, asked, "What happened?" I had just finished telling him when Coverwell came out of the airplane. The operations officer told Coverwell, "You still have time to make the mission. Get in that plane sitting over there and get into the air. I want to talk to you when you get back."

We all got our gear into the next airplane over on the hard stand. I tried to check it over the best I could, in the time we had. It was an old B-24-H and still had its old dull paint on it. The operations officer was still giving Coverwell hell when I said, "Everything is ready."

Major Wright came into the flight deck just before Coverwell started the engines and told him to listen to his crew and stop playing God. I didn't know how all this was going to work but we rushed through the check list and were back out at the end of the runway. This time, I turned the putt-putt off just before takeoff. It really wouldn't have made much difference in this B-24-H ship. Coverwell had little to say. We finally lifted off the runway at 0900 hours.

We were the last ship off the ground. The others had long been gone. There were large formations of B-24s everywhere. We were looking for our formation with the white circle and a black "F" on the tails. I saw our group about three formations ahead of us at 2

o'clock, and pointed to it. Lieutenant Coverwell began to head for it. We were still lagging far behind the formation when we crossed the English coastline.

I said, "Lieutenant, please, get the ship in a slot somewhere so we're not flying out here by ourself."

He gave the engines some throttle. The airplane moved up and we took a place on the right wing of the last airplane in the formation. We were supposed to be about three flights up, as a left wing man, but someone had already taken our place.

Now we were on "flak corner" and exposed to all the fighters, if there was an attack. I put on my steel helmet, and my flak suit and got up into the top turret. We all test fired our guns and started reporting in to the pilot.

The ball turret gunner said on the intercom, "I can't get in the ball turret. I have a bad knee. I can't bend it." I said, "What? What in the hell is wrong?" "I can't fly the ball turret," he said. "I can't get down in it."

I told him to come to the flight deck and get into the top turret, that I would fly the ball turret. The ball would be put down through a hole, and, outside the belly of the plane, when we needed to use it in combat. Most of the time, it would be kept up, inside the plane to conserve fuel. The gunner came to the top turret and got in it, leaving his leg hanging down.

I went back through the bomb bay. The safety wires were still in the bombs. I pulled the wires, breathing from a walk around oxygen bottle hanging on me. We were now over enemy territory. I could hear flak bursting. I got to my position at the ball turret.

I kept thinking, "What a crew this is. How could God do this to me?"

We had only received a few bursts of flak and our fighter protection was out there with us. I sat in the ball turret with the door unlatched, up inside the plane. If I had to go down, I would latch the door shut as I went down. I didn't trust this crew to pump me back up. I test fired my guns straight down. The crew wasn't saying anything. I really thought they were all scared stiff. I was scared, just being up there with them.

We reached our IP. The target was an oil refinery. I saw bombs falling and the target passing under me. There were big round oil tanks that looked like golf balls, and cone-shaped tanks. Huge yellow balls of fire and several concussion rings were coming from the tanks as the bombs exploded.

It was a real fireworks show. The target just wasn't there any longer.

## Hung in Open Bomb Bay

I suddenly realized I had not felt our bombs drop. The bomb bay doors were still open. The co-pilot told Coverwell, "We can't drop our bombs. They won't drop." The bombardier said, "I tried to make them go. I hit the release." Coverwell said, "We have to get rid of them. We don't have enough fuel to take them back." I said, "Has the Salvo been pulled?" "It has," said the co-pilot.

I snapped on an oxygen walk-around bottle and dropped my flak suit and steel helmet. I said, "I'm going out in the bomb bay to see what I can do."

In the bomb bay, I pulled on the shackles on each side of the rear section of the bomb bay, trying to release the bombs. The bombs fell from the rear two sections. I tried to make my way to the front two sections on the cat walk.

The wind was blowing so hard that it was almost picking me up. I was having a hard time holding on with one hand while trying to release the shackles with the other. The temperature was twenty-eight below zero. I now had one more bay to release. The front left bay. I released the bottom cluster and it fell. From some reason, I stuck my arm and hand around a support between the bomb fins and released the top shackle. The bombs fell and hung on part of my left sleeve, yanking me down to the catwalk of the bomb bay.

My oxygen bottle was knocked loose and fell down into the slipstream and blew off. I was holding onto the cat walk with all my strength. One leg was being whipped by the slipstream.

The air pressure that was blowing by was beating me to pieces. I kept trying to pull myself back onto the catwalk. Some of my flight clothes were hung on something. I couldn't get back up. I knew that we were above 18,000 feet and I had to get more oxygen soon.

I could see a pair of eyes in an oxygen mask looking at me through the glass on the door to the flight deck. It was the radio operator. He saw me and opened the door. He had a portable oxygen bottle in one hand. He reached for my oxygen hose and plugged it into the bottle.

The radio operator caught hold of my shoulder and arm and helped me get back up onto the cat walk. I looked down and it was a long way to the ground. I sat there for a minute and then got up on my feet and waddled back to the ball turret. The radio operator returned to the flight deck.

It took me a few minutes to recover my senses. I plugged in my radio, and the ship's oxygen supply to my mask. I realized that the bomb bay doors were still open. I said on the intercom, "Close the bomb bay doors." After about a minute, the bomb bay doors closed.

I sat there in the ball turret with the door open, thinking. The target was destroyed but not by our bombs. I had remembered seeing the first bombs that I had released from the rear of the bomb bay hit in a little German country town and some of the others in a field around it. I was beginning to feel the cold and saw that I had not plugged in my heated suit. As soon as I did, I began to feel some warmth. I kept thinking about this crew that I was flying this mission with. I didn't know how they would ever make it through thirty.

After we had crossed the enemy coastline, I went to the flight deck and checked the fuel gauges for fuel. We were very low. We had been in the air about eight hours, and had dragged the open bomb bay doors for about an hour. We had enough fuel to get to our base if this guy didn't do something else - like getting lost over England.

Lieutenant Coverwell sat the ship down at the airfield and taxied to the hard stand. The truck picked us up as soon as we were out of the ship. On the way to debriefing, Lieutenant Coverwell sat in the front seat of the truck with the driver. He didn't say anything to me.

Everyone still seemed to be scared out of their mind. When the truck stopped at debriefing, I went straight to operations and found Major Wright. I filled him in on the complete mission as I saw it happen. He told me that he would take care of everything, that there had been some problems with Lieutenant Coverwell's training check flights.

"I tried to tell you that at the briefing this morning," Major Wright said.

If Wright had told me, he had put it too nicely. I hadn't understood what he meant, and had gone on the mission anyway. "My only concern now is that they don't kill themselves," I said. I

thought they should be checked out again. The major said, "Go on to debriefing and forget it."

When I got to debriefing, Coverwell's crew had been debriefed and had left. As I changed out of my flight gear, I kept thinking, "I'm sure not going to let a green crew keep me from coming back from my twenty-ninth mission."

Only one more to go. I said, "Thank you, God, for getting me back today. Just let me make one more."

When I got back to the hut, everyone on Coverwell's crew was already in their bunk. It was 1900 hours and it still wasn't dark. I sat on the bunk for a while and went over and thanked Coverwell's radio operator for coming out into the bomb bay and helping me.

I said, "I don't think I would have ever got up from the bomb bay catwalk if you had not helped me. I told the briefing officer what you did." He said, "I really didn't know what was happening. I just saw you down there and I knew you needed oxygen. The pilot had sent me back to see if the bombs were all out of the bomb bay."

I lay back on my bunk and went to sleep. I was awakened by someone shaking my shoulder. It was Lieutenant William H. Williams, one of the original 703rd Squadron crew pilots. He asked me if I would like to fly a mission tomorrow. "I need a nose gunner," he said. I told him, "I'll fly with you. Thanks for asking me."

"I know it will be your last mission," he said. "I have only two more to make, myself, after tomorrow."

He had a reputation of being one good pilot, and a very fine person.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll see you tomorrow." He walked out.

## My Last Flight and A Pilot Says Thanks

The next morning came quickly. In my sleep I had dreamed that I had finished my missions.

I was glad to hear the Jeep coming. When the sergeant came into the hut, his voice was like music to my ears. Everyone else in the hut was still asleep. I dressed as quickly as I could and headed for the mess hall. I looked up at the sky.

There were stars. It looked like it was going to be a good day for flying. After breakfast, I dressed out and went to the briefing room. I was about the first one there. I began to think that briefing would never start. Everyone finally showed up. It was now after 7 o'clock.

Our target for today was the rocket emplacements and the airfield at Tutow, Germany.

I knew the place. I had been there on April 9, in a real shoot out. The weather had been bad that day. Now we were going to have good weather on this beautiful May 13. It was a very pretty Saturday morning. The briefing officer said the visibility over the target would be excellent; we could hit it without any cloud problems.

After briefing, I rode out in the truck with Lieutenant Williams and his crew. There was all the difference in the world between this crew and the one I had flown with the day before. Lieutenant Williams even joked a little about this mission going to be an easy one. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but his joking was reassuring. We arrived at the airplane and I put all my gear in the nose by the nose turret.

This was the first time in the nose turret for me, so it would be a new experience. Up front, I would get to see everything that was coming before we got to it.

Lieutenant Williams lifted off the runway at 10 o'clock. I didn't get into the nose turret until we were at 5,000 feet. We carried fifty-two, 100-pound incendiaries and general purpose bombs. Lieutenant Williams went straight to our formation and formed in position.

The group was sending out only fifteen aircraft. There were several other groups of B-24s forming and they fell in behind our group. Lieutenant Williams was flying lead position in the second flight. This put us one aircraft from the front of the formation.

Sitting in the nose turret was like being out in space by myself, other than the one plane above our nose and the two wing men. The enemy coastline was coming up in front of us. Lieutenant Williams said on the intercom, "Test fire your weapons." I fired several bursts and reported, "Okay." I put on my flak suit and steel helmet.

I could see only spotty flak as we crossed the coastline, none close to us. Our P-51s were crossing in front of us, high. It was a good feeling to see them. I began to ask God, "Please, take care of

us today." Being in the nose turret made me feel that I was all alone with Him today.

The tail gunner in the ship in front of me would wave at me when his ship would drop down in front of me. Sometimes he was just a few feet away from me. I would wave back at him.

The trip to the target dragged on. No enemy fighters had arrived. No flak had been close to our group. Our fighter protection was still with us but now they were P-38s. The P-51s had dropped their tanks and gone back. We reached our IP and I felt the bomb bay doors come open. Then, "Bombs away." I couldn't see our bombs. The ship above and in front of me looked like a big whale opening its mouth with incendiaries dropping out of it.

The bundles of incendiaries dropped about 500 feet and then split apart, like match sticks falling. I remembered when they would come back into the formation behind them, when I first started flying missions. Thank God for the person who thought of the nose cone and the tail fins to control the clusters. I watched the bomb bay door close on the ship above and in front of us and then felt ours close. The waist gunner confirmed.

I called out on the intercom, "Two rockets being fired from the ground at 11 o'clock." Long white trails were coming up toward our formation. I kept watching the two rockets come up. They came closer and closer. Then they passed just in front of our lead ship.

We were at 23,000 feet. There was beginning to be a cloud cover over the ground but we could still see through it in spots.

The top turret gunner called out, "Fighters. Me 109s high at 5 o'clock." I saw the tail gunner in the ship above and in front of us start firing. His spent shells cases were coming back and hitting the front of my Plexiglas turret. I said on the intercom, "That tail gunner's shells were hitting us." Lieutenant Williams said, "They're hitting the window in front of me, too. I'm moving up. Maybe they'll fall under us." He moved the ship a little to the left and ahead until almost even with the tail of the ship above us.

He was flying a close formation. No enemy fighter was going to fly between us in this formation. We were all so close that it was like one big airplane. I saw one Me 109 pass on our left about 11 o'clock with two P-38s on its tail, heading for the clouds. I kept hearing a new wind sound and looked above my steel helmet and there was a hole knocked in the Plexiglas by one of the spent

shell casings that had been hitting us from the tail turret guns in front of us.

We crossed the enemy coast and flew out over the North Sea. The fighter cover was still with us. We received no flak as we left the enemy coastline. It was a long flight over water before I saw the English coast.

Lieutenant Williams said, as we came to the coast, "Congratulations, Robbie. You have finished your tour of missions. When we get to the field we will do it up right. I am going to buzz the tower for you, so hold on down there in that nose turret. Thanks for flying with us today."

That was the first time that anyone had ever said, "Thanks for flying with us."

When we reached the field, Lieutenant Williams was true to his word. He buzzed the tower, missing it by only a few feet. In the nose turret, I could see it coming right in my face.

As we passed, Lieutenant Williams said, "Let's do it again. I don't think they saw us."

I had seen the guys in the tower ducking as we went by the first time. Lieutenant Williams made a 360 degree turn and came back over the tower. Then he pulled up into the landing pattern and sat the plane down in his turn. It had been exactly eight hours since we had taken off, on this Saturday, May 13, 1944.

It was really hard for me to believe that I had made it. I felt happy - and stunned.

Lieutenant Williams taxied onto the hard stand, parked and cut the engines. All the crew got out and patted me on the back and shook my hand. Lieutenant Williams walked over to me and put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Good show."

We all got into the truck and went to debriefing, then to the locker room and back to our hut. I was pretty proud of myself for finishing. I was beginning to believe that this day would never come.

I kept thinking about the trip today in the nose turret, the view, the buzzing of the tower, the flying with a perfect crew and pilot. This had made my last mission something to remember the rest of my life.

Then the thought hit me, "Elizabeth, I will be home with you soon." I would be going home to see and be with my wife. Everything was beginning to go right, for a change. This was a wonderful day to be alive.

In the next few days, I learned from Jack Carlile that his pilot, Lieutenant Coverwell, had been grounded and was being transferred. Their crew had been on two training and check flights. Things went bad on both flights. Carlile was being assigned to another crew.

On April 15, I was told to report to squadron headquarters. I walked in and they told me that I was being assigned to post defense while awaiting orders to return to the Zone of the Interior, the good old USA. I would be flying a training mission in England at least once a week until orders were received to return. The orders would be cut as soon as transportation was available.

## You Can't Go Home

The officer at headquarters told me that I would receive a pass to town as soon as I moved out of the crew hut and into the post defense area. I returned to the hut and packed everything, and carried it all on my shoulder to my new housing which was near the main gate of the base. It was a large building with three sections in it.

The officer in charge assigned me a bunk in one wing of the building. Eight other airmen were there, all waiting for orders to go home. The officer said, "Just behave yourself and enjoy your short rest. You'll be used for any emergency that may arise. Otherwise you are on our own."

On the morning of April 17, I went to Norwich, England. The first thing I did was to send a telegram to my wife, which read: "Have finished my tour. Much Love." I spent the morning walking around the city, waiting for the theater to open. After the movie, I rode the bus back to the base. I was happy to be through with my missions, but I was beginning to feel alone.

After flying combat missions, I was not used to normal living. There was a strange feeling inside of me that seemed to be calling for more flying. Anxiety set in.

A few lonely days passed and then I was assigned to drive an armored car. It had a turret and a 303 Lewis machine gun on it. I drove it to the firing range and did some practice shooting. The post defense officer said to take it out and drive around the outside of the airfield every morning. Several of us would get in it and take our carbines. We drove around the airfield several times a day.

I really didn't know much about the vehicle. It was somewhat like driving a truck. One morning, I drove it around the field with the armor plate down over the radiator. When I got back, the engine was knocking. I had burned up the damned engine. The post defense officer said, "Take it to the shop and have it fixed."

On May 23, the air raid siren sounded, just before dark. I was sent to a dugout gun emplacement on the airfield. It was a compound with dirt bags stacked around, with a .50 caliber, water-cooled machine gun in the center of it.

Of all people, Cross was standing by the gun. He and I were assigned to the dugout. He told me that Dabbs was in the dugout to our left with some guy. We sat by the gun most of the night. The searchlights were waving back and forth in the sky.

Cross said that he had two more missions to make. We talked about going home soon. We wondered what we were doing out here in the dark in this damned hole with a machine gun.

"It's better than flying combat," Cross said. "We agree on that," I said. The officer of the day finally came by, during the night, and told us there was a report that the Germans had dropped paratroops in the area, to be on the alert. This made us get serious about what we were doing.

We put on our steel helmets and flak suits. Then we sat there listening to every sound or movement near the fence hedge row. To our left, the silence was broken by gunfire. There were a number of long bursts. Then we saw trucks coming with their spotlights turned on. Cross and I were ready to shoot anything that moved. The officer of the day identified himself and put a light on his Jeep so we could see him.

He came over to us and said, "Men, the gun emplacement to your left has just killed a cow in that farmer's field outside of the base. Don't shoot any of the farmer's cows. Identify what you shoot before you shoot."

We found out later that Dabbs was the guy who had shot the cow.

Time passed slowly.

While I was driving around, outside the airfield one day, I stopped and picked up a little black and white dog. He looked like he didn't have anything to eat. I put him in the armored personnel carrier and took him back to the base with me and fed him. I didn't know if I adopted him or he adopted me, but he sure became a lot of company for all of us in the barracks. I took him everywhere that I



My little dog.

drove the personnel carrier. He would just sit on top of it while I was driving.

June arrived, and with it it came rumors that an invasion of Europe could take place at any moment. Several airplanes and gliders had sat down at our base and took off again. C-47s landed with mechanical problems, were repaired and left. It looked suspicious.

I had not heard anything more about going back to the States.

I was lying on the bunk, one morning, reading some letters from Elizabeth. She was expecting me home any minute. In walked Cross. "I'm going to move in with you," he said. He had finished his missions on May, 31. His last flight was to Lumes, France.

I showed him around and told him that, at last, we had a hot water shower with plenty of hot water. This was something that we never had at the old latrine and hut, all the time we were flying combat. Cross was assigned to the wing on the other side of the building from me. We started dreaming up things to do. He brought me his old radio and we fixed it up.

I found out that the building that we were in had several speakers to be used as loudspeakers. There was one big speaker outside on a post. We hooked two of the speakers in the building to Cross' radio. The old Limey radio had enough audio power to drive both speakers. Now we could listen to a German radio station and good music. It helped to change the mood around the building.

The only thing bad about it was, we had to listen to whatever Cross wanted to listen to. The radio was his and sat by his bunk.

On June 4, I was told to make a training flight to an airfield near London. We were to deliver a package. The weather was cloudy over most of England. Just a break in the clouds once in a while. I flew as first engineer. As we approached the airfield, Spitfires came by us and looked us over good. We flew just under the cloud cover at two thousand feet. I could see a huge buildup of boats massed around the mouth of the Thames River. I had never paid much attention to it before. There were huge oil tanks everywhere that you looked. Boy, what a target that would make. I didn't know how the Germans kept from hitting it all. We sat down, delivered the package and flew back to our airbase. Two hours and twenty minutes of flying time.

I went by headquarters to see when my orders to go home would be coming through. Captain Bursic told me that it would be a while, because there were too many rumors about an invasion of Europe soon, and too much activity taking place, moving men into the London area. He thought that we would be held until Division was sure that things were going to go okay. They had to be sure we would not be needed.

I walked out saying, "Damn. I wrote Elizabeth that I would be home any day." I wrote her it wouldn't be more than a couple of weeks, at the most. Now, I would have to write and change it. I knew she would be disappointed. I knew I was sure disappointed. I walked on back to post defense, feeling let down.

Just my luck.

Back at the post defense barracks, I told Cross about my conversation with Captain Bursic. He said he was going to find out about it. They had told him that he would get his orders to go home within two weeks. In a little while, Cross came back with the same story they had given me.

On June 5, here came Dabbs, moving in with us. He had finished his missions. After he moved in, Dabbs took off and was gone most of the time. I think he was at a farm house near the base most of the time. We never saw him except when he was coming back from or going to the farm house. That was Dabbs.

Cross and I found some bicycles and began to ride all over the base together. I took the dog with me when I rode the bike and when I drove the armored car around the base. He went everywhere with me. Cross and I named the mutt Skippy. He was getting to be

a lot of pleasure to have around us. He answered to his new name. He really seemed to like the name.

Cook and Tyler moved into the ground crew quarters and began working part time in the hangars. Van Bogelen had come to post defense before I did and was in another barracks.

On June 6, we heard that the invasion of Europe was on. It had started at 1:30 a.m. The weather was cloudy and raining.

Our group sent out four raids to the French Coast. There was now one or two raids to the French coast every day.

Losses were way down. My original group had brought over sixty-two crews and airplanes and had lost fifty-seven of them.

Only thirteen airplanes had been lost in a month and half of flying. Group had been able to send out forty-one missions since I had left! They could only send out seventy-two missions in the six months I flew, between December 1943 and May 13, 1944. I just couldn't believe that forty-one missions had been flown in the last month and half I had been with post defense.

Some crews, who had only arrived just as I stopped flying in May, already were finishing their missions. Most of their missions had been short. We had flown deep into Germany.

Now, since I had been here in post defense, the group flew forty-one missions in only a month and half and had lost only thirteen airplanes. What a difference - and all the flights this month had been in good weather.

I kept thinking, "I'm always around just before the good things come along. Always on the short end. Snake bit."

On June 25, I flew another training flight to an airfield just outside London and delivered more packages. I flew as first engineer. The sky was still cloudy but the rain had stopped. Our altitude was 2,000 feet, just under the clouds. The English Channel was full of boats and ships. It looked as though there was not enough water in the channel to float all the boats that were in it.

When I got back to my barracks, I sat on the bunk, reading Elizabeth's letters and trying to write to her, having to tell her I didn't know when I would be home.

I read her last letter. She was expecting me home any day. She had quit her job on June 1, so that we could be together. She would go with me anywhere I was assigned in the United States. Now I didn't know when I would get home and, in the meantime, Elizabeth would have to live off of my allotment. I didn't know how her finances were doing. She never complained about anything

in her letters. I hardly knew what to write to her now. I could only say that I would be home as soon as possible.

The invasion of Europe was making headway.

Cross and I had accumulated a good number of bomb mission pictures from the S-2 photo lab. Many of the K-20 pictures were of missions we had made. With Cross' box camera, we had made several pictures of Skippy, the dog, and post defense. Cross and I would develop the film at the photo lab and roll on some more film when we could get it.

It was now July. I was just dragging around, trying to keep busy, riding the bicycle every evening and driving the armored vehicle around every morning, and playing cards with Cross at night.

We visited Buckey Kroll several times at the hospital. We tried to see Wright but they never let us in.

On July 22, I made a training flight as first engineer to Manchester, England and back. That evening, we flew to an airfield near London and back, delivering packages. Total flying time for the two trips was five hours. It kind of felt good to fly again, and especially at low level.

Nothing happened exciting except playing with the dog until August 5. Captain Bursic, the squadron adjutant, came to post defense that day to see me. He smiled and said, "Robinson, who are you? I mean, really? Where do you come from?" I was wondering what he was talking about. He said, "We just got orders from the Supreme Allied Command for you to report to London. They want you there at 0900 hours on August 6. Would you get dressed and pick up the orders from me at headquarters, as soon as possible?"

It all seemed very mysterious. I decided to say nothing and let Captain Bursic think whatever he wanted to about me.

I got dressed as soon as I could, threw some junk in my bag, and took off for headquarters to pick up those orders.

Captain Bursic took me to the train station in his Jeep. He treated me nice. On the way, he asked if I was part of S-2 or something. I told him no. He didn't believe me. Everyone at 703rd Headquarters tried to be nice to me when I went to pick up the orders.

It was all as much a surprise to me as it was to them. My orders said to report to London and make a radio broadcast. I thought, "A radio broadcast?" That's about all the orders mentioned. Captain Bursic already had arranged for the train ticket

and everything and made sure that I was on the train for London. He shook my hand goodbye and said, "I'll see you in a few days. Make a good report." I just didn't know what to think.

At the London train station, I got a cab and told him to take me to the address on the orders. He drove me to 44 Cadogan Place.

The address turned out to be a town house. I paid the cabbie and went inside. There was a soldier sitting at a table. I showed him my orders. The soldier told me to take a cot in one of the front rooms upstairs. I walked up the steps and there were three soldiers in the room. I took the one empty cot and said, "Hello." They all nodded. It was very late. Darkness was beginning to take over outside. One of the soldiers closed the double drapes across the windows and turned the lights on. The soldier on my side of the room said his name was Jim and he was from Texas. He was waiting to go across the channel. He was a clerk in an Infantry outfit.

The air raid siren started sounding. Jim said there was an air raid shelter downstairs in the rear of the building. "If you want to go," he said. I said, "No. I think I'll just stay here. I want to try to find something to eat somewhere." He said there was a mess hall down the street in another town house.

Suddenly I heard a sound that went *burr-burr-burr-burr*. It was coming closer. Then I heard a *burp-burp*, then a pause and then another *burp*. I turned to say something to the soldier. All three of them were running down the stairs. I got up and followed. I heard a *Swisssh* and a deafening *BOOOOM* and felt a pressure wave. I was almost to the bottom of the steps.

The soldiers turned and walked past me, back up the steps. One said, "It's all over." I followed them back up to the room. I lay down on the cot. No one had to tell me I had heard and felt my first "buzz bomb."

I decided to get up and go see what had happened and where. Jim said, "It'll be too dark. And the home guards won't let you get near the place it hit, anyway." The guy next to me said, "Buzz bombs drop around here all the time." I lay there all night with my clothes on. Before the night was over there were two more raids, but the buzz bombs didn't fall as close to us as the first one had.

I watched each hour passing on my watch, all night long. At 6 o'clock I got up and tried to clean up. Then I walked down the street to find the town house with the mess hall. It was a city block to the mess hall. Across from it, the whole damned block was

down to nothing but rubble and debris. There were fire fighters and soldiers going through the rubble. The street beyond the mess hall was blocked off. I turned around and went back to where I came from. I walked on down the street until I found a cabbie. I read my orders to him and told him to take me there. The order, Special Order Number 199, said to report to 28 Grosvenor Square, room 403.

At 28 Grosvenor Square, I got out and walked up to a large door. There were two Limey guards standing by the door. I showed one of them my orders and he opened the door for me to enter. The door had iron bars on it. I walked into what looked like a big tunnel. The guard inside read my orders and called two guards to walk beside me and take me to room 403. It seemed we walked for a mile through the tunnel. It was like a subway. All the way, the two guards never said a word. They were all military. I didn't know if I was a prisoner or what. I just kept walking. We soon got to room 403. The guards stopped at the door.

I opened the door and walked in. There was a man standing in the room in an American uniform with a War Correspondent's marker on his sleeve. He looked at me and then started to introduce himself. He shook hands with me and said, "It was nice of you to come." I said, "I didn't have any choice in the matter." He said his name was Chanault. "I'm a good friend of your brother, Odes Robinson. Odes works for CBS. We want you to make a broadcast which will be aired in the States."

My brother owned a CBS affiliate radio station in the Carolinas. Still, I wondered, "Why me?"

He asked a few questions, and then we went into a glass room. He indicated a desk where I could sit. He gave me a prepared speech to read. "Read it aloud, several times," he said. We rehearsed reading it at least six times. It was twenty minutes long. After the rehearsals, he said to be back at the same time the next morning.

"The speech will go out on the air to the USA in a live broadcast from this room," he said.

I left the same way that I came in, escorted to the door by the same two guards. The door opened and I walked out onto the street. I began to look for some place to get some food. I found a little shop that was selling fish and chips. I ate an order of fish and chips, standing on the street and looking around for a cab. I walked for a few blocks and took a cab back to the government billets at 44 Cadogan Place.

Late in the afternoon, I found the mess hall and ate, then bought a newspaper and went back to the billet. I lay on the cot and stayed in the room until the next morning. The other soldiers were gone. I was the only one in the room the second night.

I lay awake all night, waiting for buzz bombs to come. I didn't hear anything but air raid sirens during the night - followed by the all clear. I was up and dressed before 5 a.m. Several soldiers were there from ground troop units when I went to the mess hall and ate. We barely spoke to each other. They seemed to have a lot on their minds. They were heading for France.

I found a cabbie to take me back to the same place as the day before. The same two guards walked beside me with machine guns to the same room. I entered and Mr. Chanault, the war correspondent, said, "I'm glad you got here early. We can go ahead and get started."

He picked up the typed speech and said, "I have changed this up to fit what you have been doing over here. Read it out loud for me." He handed me the speech. I read it out loud to him. He said, "That's good. Now we will go to the broadcasting room."

We walked out with guards on each side of us. We went down to another room that was all glass windows. Limey guards stood outside the door with their machine guns on their shoulders.

Mr Chanault and I went into the room and sat down by a control panel. He said, "Remember, don't say one thing that is not on that piece of paper in front of you. The men on the other side of the panel will cut you off if you do. The penalty is court martial, so stick to the script."

He pointed to a little light on the panel in front of me. "Start talking when this light comes on. And talk slowly."

## The Electronic Air Mission

The light came on and Mr. Chanault waved his hand for me to start talking. I read the script slowly. It lasted about twenty minutes. Then the light went off.

Mr Chanault shook my hand and said, "Thanks. They'll be interested to hear you, back in the States. This will be broadcast along the East Coast."

He walked out with me and said, "Have a nice trip back to your base."

The two guards got on each side of me and we marched back to the front door and they let me out. The two Limey guards never said a word and looked like some kind of toy soldiers, all English military discipline. I looked back and thought, "That tunnel must go on forever." It took a good ten minutes to get back to the door.

I went out onto the street and the door guards closed in behind me. I felt relieved to get that over with and to be out of there.

"Why me?" I asked myself again. I thought, "If I ever see Odes, I'm going to kick him in the rear end for doing this to me. I almost get hit by a buzz bomb and go through all of this, just to say someone else's words on the radio for twenty minutes. And the words didn't even sound like me."

I soon found a cabbie to take me to the Liverpool station. I found the next train to Tivetshall and stood around near the track until it was ready to leave.

While I was sitting on a bench by the train, a young lady came over and sat beside me for a few minutes. She said, "Yank, you look lonely. I know what I can do for you." I said, "Thanks, but I have to be on this next train to Tivetshall." She said, "Sorry. Maybe next time." She got up and walked on. I saw her stop another soldier, down the track. "She's a very pretty girl," I thought, as she walked away.

I got on the train and was on my way back to the base. I was thinking about dreaming up some long tale to tell Cross and everyone back at the base. I could think of all kinds of stories to tell. Spy stories about secret agents and such. Then I thought, "They won't even believe the truth when I tell it to them."

The train stopped at every little station on the way back. I stood in the corridor, looking out the window as the train passed through all the little towns. The coach was packed with people leaving London.

One Englishman was trying to keep up a conversation with me. I couldn't understand him. He was talking Cockney. I thought he said he was going to Norwich to live with his cousin. He was getting away from the buzz bombs. The train, somehow, didn't stop at Tivetshall and I ended up in Norwich.

I tried to make the train conductor at Norwich understand that I was supposed to get off the train at Tivetshall but it had not stopped. He didn't understand or didn't care. He kept pointing to where I could buy a ticket back to Tibenham. I bought a ticket and had to wait for two hours for another train.

It was dark when I got back to the base. Cross was in a card game. I talked him into walking with me to headquarters to report back. I couldn't wait to tell him about the trip to London.

The next day, August 8, I flew a training flight to London, and another on August 9.

On August 10, an alert sounded. We all jumped up and grabbed our steel helmets and carbines.

This was it! We filled our pockets with ammunition and ran out to the armored truck and sat there waiting for the next order. A buzz bomb passed over the field. I could hear *burr-burr-burr*. I could see it passing about 500 feet up, like a miniature plane. I knew there was nothing to worry about until I heard it go *burp-burp-burp*. I had learned that in London. The buzz bomb passed on. I thought it had been knocked off its course by an RAF fighter, for we had not received a buzz bomb alert before.

The very next night, another buzz bomb came over and just passed on across the field. I was sitting on the bunk, reading Elizabeth's latest letter. Elizabeth had received my letter, the one telling her that I was delayed in getting home. She wrote that she was so disappointed that I had not left England yet. Elizabeth had not worked since June first, waiting for me to return home. Here it was August 12, and I was still over here in Tibenham.

On August 13, I was told to take some of the men and lead them through a field of tall grass outside our airfield. We were to pretend that enemy ground troops were hiding there, poised to attack our base. Our job was to find them. The post defense officer laid out the plans on a chart. I was to drive an armored car through the field with six soldiers deployed behind me. I took the six men and we drove out into the field of tall grass.

I was doing a pretty good job of knocking down the grass with the vehicle. The six men rode on the back of the armored car because the field was soft and muddy in spots. We drove through the field several times, and then back onto the road. The field was rutted and the grass in it was really beat up when we came out.

Cross went with me. He said, "This is really some way to pass the time." I said, "You bet. But it could be worse. We could be doing it in France."

When I was about to run out of fuel, we poured the last of the gasoline into the fuel tank, and we returned to the base.

On August 15, the post defense officer came to the barracks and asked me about Saturday's maneuvers in the armored vehicle. He said, "I want to know why you didn't go into the field that you

were supposed to go in." I said, "I did." I showed him the chart that he had marked and given to me. He said, "You went into a private English corn field and destroyed the farmer's crop! The Air Force is going to have to pay for it."

He got out his chart and I pointed out that the field he had marked on my chart was not the same one he had marked on his chart.

He left, taking my chart and his chart with him. I made sure that everyone in the barracks was in on the conversation and was looking at the charts, including the men who had been with me on the assignment. I told Cross that if we were in a corn field, it wasn't the same kind of corn that we grew in America. It was some kind of wheat that the English called corn.

I never heard anything more about the corn field so I guess it was settled

On August 16, I was called to report to headquarters. I thought, "It's going to be about the damned corn field." I looked for Cross to go with me. I knew that if I was by myself, I could get railroaded for someone else's mistake. I couldn't find Cross. I walked as slowly as I could to headquarters, trying to think up something.

## The Impossible Dream

As I walked into headquarters, Captain Bursic looked at me and said, "Robbie, come in the office. I have something that you have been looking for." In the office, Captain Bursic handed me some orders. and smiled. "You are hereby ordered to report to a port of embarkation to return to the Zone of Interior."

I couldn't believe my ears were hearing this. It brought tears to my eyes. What a day this was. The impossible had happened. I was going home. I saluted Captain Bursic and tried to say thanks. I got out of headquarters as fast as I could. I sure didn't want anybody changing the orders.

I ran all the way to the barracks. I threw everything I had in my bag and got dressed. I still couldn't find Cross to say goodbye so I left for the train station. I had to be in Liverpool on the August 18. I would be taking a boat from there to the States. I wasn't going to miss that boat.

At the train station, I bought a ticket to Liverpool by way of Cambridge, Nottingham and Manchester. I changed trains in Cambridge and arrived in Nottingham late in the evening. I could not get a train to Manchester until the next evening. I got on a bus and rode to Connie Stephenson's home to say goodbye and tell them that I was going home. It was dark when I knocked on the door. Connie and Steve were glad to see me. We talked a while and they asked me to spend the night with them. I had to be on the train at 8 the next morning and Connie said she would see that I was up in time to make it. Jean was not there. Connie said Jean was in London, singing in an operetta and would be home the next day.

Connie awakened me and got me on the bus early the next morning. It was like leaving my family. I had only seen them three times but they were some of my family. It seemed we had known each other forever. Connie and her family had been so very nice to me when I needed it most.

They probably had helped me keep my sanity during some difficult days.

The bus picked me up and I got off at the train station. I was on the train at 8:30 and on my way. The train was thirty minutes late. It was not crowded. There were plenty of compartment seats. Two elderly English ladies sat facing me. Every time the train would jerk, they would smile at me. They never said a thing, even when I spoke to them. They just smiled whenever the train jerked.

Somewhere before Manchester, the train stopped. Passengers were getting on and off. After the train started again, a very pretty young lady came into the compartment and asked if she could sit beside me, pointing to the double seat that I was sitting on. I told her she could. She sat there for a while, looking out the window. She spoke to the two elderly ladies sitting across from us in the same compartment. She asked where I was going. "Liverpool," I said. She said, "I'm going to Manchester." She said she was a school teacher for small children and lived with her mother in Manchester.

She was the prettiest girl I had seen in England and she was in her twenties. In fact, I had not seen many English girls. I was feeling quite honored to have such a pretty young English lady sitting beside me here in the train, talking to me.

She moved over closer to me. I could feel her warmth beside me. We began to exchange information about our lives and where we were born. She wanted to know about America. As the train neared Manchester, she put her hand on my knee and asked,

"Could you spend some of the day in Manchester? I should like to introduce you to my mother, and show you around the city."

I knew that I had to be in Liverpool tonight, and I wasn't about to miss the boat taking me home to Elizabeth. No one was worth that to me. Not even a pretty English girl who was warm to feel and smelled like a girl should.

I said, "I am so very, very sorry. My orders just won't let me. I have to be in Liverpool tonight. I just don't have any leave time."

The train pulled into the Manchester station. I helped her off the train with her baggage. The conductor said that the train would remain there thirty minutes. I walked beside her, carrying her bags to the ticket gates.

The Limey who was attending the gate looked at my ticket. He said, "If you walk through the gate, you will have to buy another ticket to Liverpool." I told the Limey, "I would like to help the young lady put her bags in a cab." A cab was sitting about one hundred feet outside the gate. I tried to call the driver but he wouldn't pay any attention to me or couldn't hear me.

The people behind me said, "No you won't have to buy another ticket, Yank! This man is just trying to be mean to you."

I thought, "To hell with this damned Limey." I picked up her bags and walked on through the gate. The woman behind me said, "Good, Yank." I walked the pretty English girl to the cab and put her bags in. I told her, "I have to go. I can't miss the train."

She said, "I hope you don't have any trouble with the ticket attendant. I wish that I could have gotten to know you better." She put her arm around my neck and kissed me. "Have a safe trip back to the States," she said and stepped into the cab. The cabbie closed the door.

I turned and ran back to the gate. I looked back and she was waving from the cab. The Limey ticket agent stopped me at the gate and said, "Get a ticket from that man what sells them." He pointed to a barred window with a woman behind it. There were several English people standing around when I went back to the gate. They all started shouting at the ticket agent, "Let the Yank through! Don't you see he was helping the young lady?" One English lady was giving him hell and started hitting him with her umbrella.

I handed the lady behind the barred ticket window some money and she gave me a second ticket to Liverpool.

People were shouting, "Don't buy another ticket, Yank! We will get you a Bobbie. He will let you in." I didn't want any trouble and didn't have much time before the train would leave.

I took the ticket to Liverpool and walked through the gate, thinking of the girl departing in the cab. I was flattered that a pretty woman had paid attention to me. It had been such a long time since I had such attention, or heard nice things said in such a lovely way. I couldn't help from feeling good inside. But I knew that I was going home to my Elizabeth, and that meant more to me than just spending a pleasant afternoon, even with a pretty English girl.

As I was about to get on the train, I looked back and the English people were still giving the ticket agent hell, almost fighting with him. I could see them shaking their fingers at each other. I had nearly started a riot.

I was glad now that it was over. I got on the train and sat in a compartment alone. At Liverpool, I took a cab to the base. I was assigned to a barracks with sixteen other men who were returning to the States. We would go home together.

An officer told me I was a day early. "You had a grace day of travel which you didn't use," he said. I started to think about the young lady on the train. I thought, "I'm glad I didn't know I had another day when I walked to the cab with her. I might have been tempted to go with her." It seemed to have been forever since I was so near the warmth of a woman. I really knew that Elizabeth was the only woman that I wanted to have near me the rest of my life. Maybe now it would not be too long before I would see her again. "Elizabeth, I am going to get there," I thought.

The next day, we were all interrogated. The interviewing officer asked to see all the combat pictures that I had. He asked if I kept a diary. When I showed the pictures and the diary to him, he said I would have to turn them in. He would assign me a number and, when information restrictions were lifted, the Army would return them to me. I gave him the diary and a big stack of combat pictures along with some personal pictures that Cross and I had made.

The officer asked for my .45 automatic and shoulder holster. He wanted all my flight gear and any souvenirs that I had. I was told that if I didn't turn them in, and they were found when I got on board ship, I would not be allowed to ship out. I gave him the German 20 mm projectile that came from the bomber that had been meant for my back.

I wished that I had left everything with my cousin in Nottingham. I should have left a short copy of my diary with her and she could have mailed it to me some day. It was too late now to think of that. The officer put everything in an envelope, sealed it, and put on it my name, rank and serial number. Then he wrote the address it would be sent to when the war was over. I was sure that it was the last time that I would ever see it.

The next day, I was given a physical examination. Then our pay records were checked. Everyone had arrived. We were ready to go.

On the third day, they gave us a complete shake down and made us dump out our bags and take all our clothes off. After the search, we were allowed to dress and pack again and get on a truck going to a dock.

The truck pulled up beside the biggest ship that I had ever seen. The name USS Wakefield was painted on its side. I later learned that the ship had been renamed as a troop ship and its original name had been USS Manhattan. Regardless, it was a big ship and it was going home.

As we sat on the dock, waiting to board, a large number of Germans and Mongolians, in chains, were taken aboard the ship. I wondered, "What in the world were they going to do with Mongolians?" Their arms were as big as my waist. I had never seen such gigantic humans before.

## Sailing to the New World

In our group of men going home were seventeen enlisted men, three first lieutenants and one lieutenant colonel.

The colonel was a very young fighter pilot by the name of John B. Kidd. He really did look like a kid. A very nice person. You could tell that he had plenty of combat under his belt. He seemed to really respect bomber air crews. I sure did have a lot of respect for fighter pilots. I wouldn't be going home if it weren't for them.

The ship was huge. There were hundreds of bunks, three tiers high. The seventeen enlisted men were assigned to one end of a huge bunk area. The officers were assigned to the other end. We were the only soldiers on board except the Marine guard for the prisoners, and the ship's crew.

During the night, the ship pulled out and left the dock. It looked like the twenty-one of us were going to have the run of this big ship. The first day out, the ship was swaying, front to back, in constant motion. I was getting woozie from the motion but after a few hours I began to get used to it. The food was good and there was plenty of it. Because of the sea motion, I was afraid to eat too much of it.

The second day out, the ship began swaying from side to side. Now this was beginning to get to me. I still didn't get sick but I sure could feel it. As I sat in the mess hall, the water in the glass would sway up one side of the glass and down on the other. I would try not to watch it.

The third day, the prisoners of war were brought up to the front of our deck to walk and sit in the sun. When I got close to the Mongolians, they seemed to be even bigger than when I first saw them come aboard.

They had been taken prisoners on the Western front in France. The Germans had captured them on the Eastern front and put them in the path of the Allies to fight. The German prisoners of war wouldn't have anything to do with them. I tried to talk to one of the Mongolians and trade him out of his belt buckle but he wouldn't have anything to do with it.

They had no hair, were completely bald. They had two-inch gold bands imbedded in the muscles of their arms. I kept thinking, What a man. Then I would look at the little five-foot Marine sergeant with the submachine gun who was guarding the prisoners. The submachine gun with all the ammunition made the Marine bigger than the Mongolians. When I was talking to the Mongolian the sergeant had his submachine gun pointed at him. He was herding the prisoners around like cattle. Each had a chain on his leg and they were attached to each other.

The German prisoners didn't like American airmen and would try to spit on you if you got near them when you weren't looking. Then they would smile when you turned around and looked at them. The Marine guards would put their submachine guns in the German's face when they saw it happen. The guards told us not to try to talk to them, that they were very mean and had to be made to do everything. So we gave cigarettes and some of our candy rations to the Mongolians who seemed to appreciate it. The next two mornings, the prisoners were brought up on deck to spend some time in the sun.

I spent the day watching the ocean. Water, water, water everywhere. In the evening I went forward to sit and talk to some of the boat crew members. They said they never knew where they were going next. No one ever told them where they were going. Not anything. I said we were going to the good old USA.

A sailor said that he didn't even know we were going to the States. "I thought we were going to pick up more soldiers in France," he said. The sailor was delighted that we were going to the States. He didn't believe me until I showed him my orders.

The fifth morning, the loud speakers boomed out: "Now hear this! Now hear this! Air Force sweeping detail, man your brooms! Air Force sweeping detail, man your brooms!" We wondered what the hell they were talking about. "Now hear this!" I had never heard Navy talk before. Colonel Kidd came by and told us that we would have to clean up our own area before we got off the ship in Boston. He had a bunch of brooms.

We all took some of the brooms and started sweeping the deck. Colonel Kidd helped us to clean up. I was sweeping the corridor and he was on his knees, holding a dust pan while I was sweeping trash into it.

A Navy junior grade officer, walking down the corridor, didn't see the kneeling Colonel Kidd and stumbled over the colonel's feet. The Navy officer said to the colonel, "Watch what the hell you are doing. Stand up and salute an officer when you are talked to."

Colonel Kidd stood up. He had an old pair of flying fatigues on. The collar flap fell open with a colonel's silver Oak Leaf on it. That silver Oak Leaf seemed to get as big as his face.

He looked at the Navy officer and said. "If I ever hear you talk to an air crew soldier that way again, I will personally have you swabbing decks the rest of your life. If I see a Navy officer who acts like a gentleman and officer, I will think about saluting him. Now get yourself out of the Air Force area of this tub and don't let me see you again." The Navy boy said, "Yes Sir," and saluted Colonel Kidd. In perfect military style, he turned and walked briskly away.

All the air crews gave Colonel Kidd a round of applause. Colonel Kidd said, "I meant every damn word of it. When the damned Navy acts like officers and humans, then we will respect them." Colonel Kidd picked up a broom and continued to help us sweep the corridor. He said to me, "Sergeant, the next time, if there is a next time, the Navy will clean up their own ship."

We soon finished the job of cleaning. Everyone pitched in and got the work done. The area was cleaner than when we got on the ship.

## What Presidential Citation?

On the afternoon of the fifth day, we arrived in the harbor of Boston. As we stood on the deck, waiting for the gang plank to be put down so we could get off, everyone was still carrying their gas mask. Some of the men were dropping their masks overboard into the water to keep from carrying them. I dropped mine by a door.

The dock was lined with the most beautiful American girls and women that we had ever laid your eyes on. Every one of them looked like a beauty queen, in their brightly colored dresses and their hair blowing. What a sight to see.

They were waving at us and throwing flowers and confetti. They were throwing kisses and hollering, "We love you. Welcome home." As the twenty-one of us walked down the gang plank, with Colonel Kidd in the front of us, the girls tried to touch us and hold our hands. They screamed, "We love you." The city police and the military police were trying to keep them away from us. We all entered a bus and the girls reached up and touched our hands and kissed them.

We all were so glad to be back in the good old USA. The young ladies were so beautiful and wonderful. They sure made you feel good inside. I hadn't seen a really, really pretty woman since I had left the States. I guess everyone in England just dressed differently and didn't wear all the pretty colored dresses. Most of the clothing in England was dark in color. The war had made smart new clothing unavailable to them.

We got on a bus and rode out to an Army camp. We were not allowed to get off for quite a while. Then we went into a building and, one by one, we went into a room alone, to be interviewed by a civilian who said he was with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The man looked at my records and asked me about air combat, where I was stationed, and my unit number. He asked what kind of airplane I had flown, and if it had a name. I thought, "What is he getting at? He must know where I flew."

The man told me to write a letter home. "Tell your relatives you are coming home," he said. "Too many wives and relatives

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BATTLE HONORS—Citation of units - - - - - Section IX

6. As authorized by Executive Order 9396 (sec. I, WD Bul. 22, 1943), superseding Executive Order 9075 (sec. III, WD Bul. 11, 1942), citation of the following unit in General Orders 129, Headquarters 2d Air Division, 11 April 1945, as approved by the Commanding General, European Theater of Operations, is confirmed under the provisions of section IV, WD Circular 333, 1943, in the name of the President of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction. The citation reads as follows:

The *445th Bombardment Group (H)*, *2d Air Division*, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy. On 24 February 1944 this group participated, with other heavy bombardment groups of the 2d Bombardment Division, in an attack on the Gothaer Waggonfabrik, A.G. located at Gotha, Germany. On this occasion the attacking bombers met and overcame the fiercest and most determined resistance the enemy was able to muster in defense of this target, so vital to his ability to wage war. Unprotected by friendly fighter cover the *445th Bombardment Group (H)* was under almost continuous attack from enemy aircraft for a period of 2 hours and 20 minutes. Although antiaircraft fire was hurled at the formation along the route to and from the target as well as at the target itself, the most deadly opposition was given by enemy aircraft. For 1 hour and 20 minutes before "bombs away" savage attacks were made by single and twin-engined enemy fighters in a vain attempt to keep the bombers from reaching their target. On the actual bombing run, that critical period of each bombardment mission, fierce and relentless attacks were unable to keep the bombers from accomplishing their task. For another hour after bombing, the group continued to be the object of ferocious fighter attacks. Of this group's 25 aircraft which penetrated enemy territory, 13 were lost to these fierce fighter attacks, which number is approximately twice the loss suffered by any of the other groups participating in this mission. In addition, 9 of the surviving 12 aircraft returned from the mission with battle damage. With heroic determination the *445th Bombardment Group (H)* flew its assigned course, destroying 21 enemy attackers, probably destroying 2 more, and damaging 7 during the long running battle. The target was located and bombed with extreme accuracy and devastating results. This target, the most important source of ME. 110's, was so well hit that the enemy air force suffered a most telling blow. The courage, zeal, and perseverance shown by the crew members of the *445th Bombardment Group (H)*, *2d Air Division*, on this occasion were in accordance with the highest traditions of the military service of the United States and reflect great credit on themselves and the group, and the Army Air Forces.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

G. C. MARSHALL  
Chief of Staff

OFFICIAL:

J. A. ULIO  
Major General  
The Adjutant General

Presidential Citation

have had heart attacks or even dropped dead at the sudden reappearance of a man they thought was still overseas."

There was a list of "don'ts" that he gave me, a list we had to follow as a returnee to the Zone of Interior. We were still in war. "Do not talk about combat publicly," he said. "Do not have anything published until cleared by the proper authorities in the Air Force. Do not give specific details about airmen you know, airmen who are missing in action or men you saw get killed. All of these things, and more, are a court martial offence if you do them.

"You will find that the general public will not understand what you have been through. You will grow to resent the people around you. Let them get to know you again without any sudden knowledge of your past experience.

"You will find that life here is different than it was in your dreams. Adjust to it slowly."

The FBI man stood up. He shook my hand and said, "Welcome home, sergeant. Your country loves you for what you have done for it."

I walked out of the office, kind of confused about the interview. I was asking myself, "What was he trying to tell me? What was he trying to find out?"

The Army officer outside said to get into the bus and it would take us to our barracks. It seemed that the base was keeping us separated from everyone, for some reason.

At the barracks, the cots were larger than usual and had white sheets with pillow cases on the pillows. The mattress was big, soft and wonderful. Boy! Did it feel good. The weather wasn't damp. The air even *smelled* good!

I had a good, long, warm shower with plenty of soap. An officer came in and told us where the mess hall was. Several of us walked to the mess hall together. It looked like our area of the camp was fenced off from the rest of the base. At the mess hall I couldn't believe the food. Milk, milk and milk - all you wanted.

There were several kinds of meat and steaks. Green vegetables, every kind you could think of. Everything was cooked to order. "Can this be the Army?" I thought. I ate until I couldn't eat any more. Then I topped it off with ice cream. Boy! What a meal. I hadn't ever seen this much food. Boy! Was it good to be in the USA.

After a good night's sleep, without my bed swaying up and down as it did on the ship, I woke at 8 o'clock, feeling wonderful. Breakfast was wonderful, like last night's dinner. Eggs, bacon,

sausages, pancakes, milk and all the trimmings. I tried to control myself from eating too much for I sure didn't want to get sick the first few days in the States.

I was called in and interviewed, this time by an Air Force officer. The officer checked my finance records and gave me money that he said I was due. He told me that I had certain military rights. As a returning airman, I was guaranteed one year in the Zone of Interior. After that time, I could be assigned to another combat zone. I would be given twenty days in Miami Beach, Florida, and if I was married, my wife could go with me to Miami. Her transportation would be paid for by the Army. I would be sent next to the Army center nearest to my home, which would be Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

I would be allowed five days at home, before spending twenty days in Miami. After Miami, I would be reassigned.

I was told that I must wear my uniform at all times in public and keep my orders on my person. I must wear my military ribbons and wings and look like a soldier. I was to be a credit to the Air Force at all times. The officer went over what I could wear in military ribbons and said to be proud to wear them. He spelled each one out. Air Medal with three Oak Leaf clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the European Theater of Operations ribbon with three Battle Stars, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Presidential Citation ribbon.

I said, "What Presidential Citation?"

He said, "Your unit, the 445th Group, 703rd Squadron, was presented the Presidential Citation and ribbon on May 24, 1944 for your raid on Gotha, Germany, on Feb. 24, 1944."

"That's a surprise to me," I said.

I had not known a Presidential Citation had been given to us. He said, "Go over to quartermaster's and they'll give you the ribbon, if you don't already have one. I'll give you a note to give them. Of course, you have your silver wings. You may also wear the Gunnery Sharpshooter's Medal with Marksman bar and Expert bar. You will receive five dollars a month extra in your pay for having the Distinguished Flying Cross. You will wear staff sergeant stripes, an aircraft engineer's badge, and service stripes on your sleeve."

I began to feel like somebody. He told me, "Good luck, Sergeant, and be proud that you are in the Army Air Force," he said. "We are proud of you. You are among some of the first airmen

returning to the USA. I salute you." I returned his salute and walked out.

An officer had saluted me! I had never had a pep talk like that before. "They have trained these interviewing officers well," I thought. It was hard to believe this was the Army. "Whoever is running this base knows his business," I thought.

I spent the rest of the day taking a physical examination. I had it all together, they said after the exam.

The next morning, I was on a train to Camp Shelby. I was given the comforts of a Pullman coach. Not long after the train left Boston, the conductor told us the train was going to pick up a dining car and we would be eating as soon as we passed New York City. I kept looking out the window and soon I could see New York in the distance. The train seemed to go underground and the next thing I knew, the train was inside a train station. After a few train car switches, the train was on its way again.

When we came above ground again, I could look back and see the skyline of New York. Now I could say that I had been in New York. The food wasn't bad on the train and we ate in style. Table cloths, waiters to serve the food. Everyone on the train was very nice to us. It was a far cry from being on a troop train. "I wouldn't mind traveling, if I could travel like this all the time," I thought.

The next day, the train was rolling through Kentucky, heading southwest to Memphis, my home town where my Elizabeth was waiting. Early the next morning, the train entered downtown Memphis from the north and went along the high bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River.

The river never looked so good. The train stopped for a few minutes on the bluffs. I stepped off the train and patted the ground with my hand. "Memphis, Tennessee, it sure is good to see you," I said to myself. The last time I had seen Memphis was when I flew above it at 8,000 feet, going from west to east, on my way overseas. Now I was on the ground, going north to south.

I wanted to run when I touched the ground. It was all I could do to keep from taking off. The train started to move. I jumped back on. The train rolled on through the south end of town and soon we were in the countryside of Mississippi. I kept telling myself, "I'll be back soon. Elizabeth! I am here!"

By noon, the train was in the beautiful pine trees of Mississippi. It couldn't be long, now. We finally stopped in the trees and all got off. It was at a small station inside Camp Shelby.

After a visit to the mess hall we were assigned a barracks for the night. An officer came in and said that we would be interviewed and processed this evening.

"You'll be on your way home tomorrow," he said, obviously pleased to be bringing us good news. There were only Eighth Air Force crew men to be processed and not very many of them. Everything was done again that I had been through in Boston: physical examination, finance records and flight records checked, an interview. The officers here were not as friendly to us as the officers had been in Boston. It seemed there were more Yankees here and more southerners in Boston.

## Her Voice

I found a phone and called Elizabeth. She was so happy that she could hardly talk for crying. She had received my letter saying I was in the States. I told her that I had been through Memphis early that morning, and I would be on my way home tomorrow evening.

We both hung onto the phone without saying very much. I could hardly speak. The operator said, "Deposit another sixty cents." I didn't have the change. "Goodbye, for now," I said and hung up.

I was weak inside. I didn't think the night would ever pass. I was up at 5 a.m. I went to the mess hall. I had to wait until 7 a.m. for it to open so I could get something to eat. I was given my orders at 8 a.m. I walked and ran out of the camp to Highway Forty-nine to Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I walked along the highway, trying to thumb a ride.

A man in a pickup truck stopped and picked me up. He let me ride with him to Hattiesburg to the train station. I tried to get a bus or train and found out that the train would leave first. I bought a ticket to Memphis and by 4 p.m. I was in the Union Station in Memphis. When the train stopped and I got off, I thought, "I am back at the same spot that I left Elizabeth - standing on the very same platform." I could hardly hold back the tears.

I walked outside of the station and hailed a cab. I got in and told him, "I want to go to 158 Marne Street in East Memphis." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "That's a funny question. I've never been more sure of anything in my life." He said, "You live there?"

I said, "Yes, and I haven't seen my wife in three years. I just got back from overseas. Let's get going."

As he drove through the city, it all looked so familiar and good to me. How wonderful it was to be in Memphis.

The driver seemed to have something on his mind. He had gone about half way to our home when he looked back over his shoulder and said, "Did you say 158 Marne Street?" "Yes," I said. "And you are going there to see your wife?" he said. I said "Yes." I was getting a little annoyed with him.

He said, "Well, uh. I just had a run to that address from the train station earlier." I said, "You did?" He said, "Yes." I asked, "Who did you take out there?" He said, "Well, I took another soldier out there. He was about your size and kind of looked like you." I said, "You did what? Get this damned cab out there."

All kinds of thoughts went through my mind. I couldn't imagine who the driver had taken out there. The cab pulled up in front of the house. I had already paid him so I jumped out of the cab with my bag in my hand, and ran up the sidewalk. I looked back. The cab was still sitting there. The driver was watching me.

I stepped up on the porch and Elizabeth came through the door. We met in the middle of the porch. I put my arms around her and held her close to me, hugged and kissed her. I didn't let go of her. It must have been five minutes. I looked back at the street and the cab was still there. The driver was still looking. I thought for a second and was about to tell Elizabeth what the cab driver had said.

Just then, her mother and her brother, Dosy, in a soldier's uniform came out the door. Her brother put his arm around me and her mother hugged me and kissed me.

Elizabeth said, "Dosy and mother are leaving for Brownsville. Dosy just got back from overseas, and he wants to go see his wife."

The cab driver was still watching us. As I put my arm around Dosy, the cab driver drove away, still watching us. I thought, "That was a disappointed cab driver."

I told them what the cab driver had told me. We all got a big laugh out of it. Dosy and his mother were waiting for someone to pick them up. It wasn't long before they left because Dosy wanted to see his wife as soon as he could.

I couldn't take my arms from Elizabeth. She was the most beautiful woman on earth. So soft and warm.

The next five days and nights we didn't get out of each other's sight. We were the happiest two people in the world. God

had kept us both for each other. There was no one else in the world. We visited my relatives a few times and had dinner during the week. It was about all the food that we consumed.

If we had not been invited out for dinner each night, we would possibly have died from lack of food. Maybe our love would have kept us alive for that was mainly what we lived on for the first five days.

We went to church on Sunday morning. I felt that we must thank God for what He had done for us.

My aunt picked us up in her car and we drove to a little white Presbyterian church on the edge of town. A beautiful little white church on top of a hill, surrounded with big trees. My aunt had been going there for a long time. Elizabeth and I had been there a few times before we were married.

Elizabeth wore a beautiful blue jacket and skirt. I was in my uniform, complete with the thirty mission crush hat. Elizabeth had pressed my uniform and it really had a military look.

It was a perfect Sunday morning. During the service, the preacher was nice enough to introduce Elizabeth and me to the congregation. He asked if I would say something about the air war in Europe.

I stood up. Elizabeth stood up beside me. I said, "You do not have to worry about your sons. The war was going well when I left Europe. I can assure you that your sons are flying into battle in Europe with God beside them. There are no atheists in air combat. God was with me and only the grace of God brought me back home to my wife." Then I sat down. I was holding Elizabeth's hand all time that I was talking. We sat holding hands until church was over. After the sermon, everyone greeted us and tried to make me feel welcome home.

My aunt had prepared a big meal before going to church. She drove us to her home and we had a wonderful meal with all the family. Afterward she drove us home.

It had been a wonderful Sunday and now Elizabeth and I were back in our little home. We had so much to thank God for.

## Our Miami Vacation

As the fifth day at home approached, I began to make travel plans. We would be leaving for Miami the first of the coming week.

We both would be there for two weeks, or until I was assigned to another duty. Elizabeth had made up her mind that she was going to go with me wherever I was sent. We made arrangements to rent our home for the next few weeks.

I went to the train station and bought tickets to Miami for both of us. I wanted only one berth for Elizabeth and me. The ticket agent said that he couldn't do it that way. I would have to have two berths. I argued that we were married but he wouldn't sell me only one berth. I had to buy an upper and a lower berth, one for each of us.

Time passed so very fast. We were soon sitting on the train, side by side, holding hands. When night came, we went to the Pullman car. Elizabeth got into the lower berth and I got into the upper berth. I lay there for a while and stuck my arm down between the curtain and the berth and Elizabeth held my hand. Then, after a while, I thought, "The heck with this."

I jumped out of the top berth and crawled into the lower berth with Elizabeth. We twined our arms around each other - I held her so close to me.

Morning came with the conductor announcing breakfast.

We arrived in Miami late the next night. I had never enjoyed a train ride as much as this trip with Elizabeth. I thought, "If there is a heaven, I have been in it for the last week." The Air Force had transportation waiting for us. They took us to the Ocean Grand Hotel on the ocean at Miami Beach. We were given a room overlooking the beach. It was a beautiful sight.

At 10 o'clock the next day, I would have two hours of business to attend to. The rest of the time would be ours to spend together. While in Miami Beach, only two hours each day would be spent with the Army, the rest with my angel.

The hotel room was nice and big. The ocean view was magnificent. Everything was perfect. "This is going to be one perfect vacation," I thought. Everything that we needed was right there for us.

The next morning we were up at 8 o'clock. I had to be at a meeting from 10 to noon. We went down to the lobby of the hotel and were introduced to the young lady who would be our hostess and entertainment guide while we were in Miami Beach. She was very nice and became good friends with Elizabeth. She directed us to a building a half block away, where we would be served all our meals. It was not like an Army mess hall. It had table cloths, upholstered chairs, beautiful serving lines with flowers everywhere.



The long reunion.

I thought the food in Boston was something until I saw the food laid out here in Miami Beach. Every kind of food possible. Sunny side up eggs, prepared in front of you. Oranges, grapefruit. I could hardly believe what I was seeing.

"Honey, I don't know how you could complain about Army food," Elizabeth said. "You were always saying in your letters how bad it was."

I said, "Darling, this is not Army food. This is something else." Elizabeth would always think that this is the way the Army normally fixed food.

The hostess at our hotel told me that the Air Force had taken the best chefs from all of the Miami Beach hotels and were using them all here.

We began to meet other married couples.

Staff Sergeant William Smith and his wife, Helen, were very nice and so much fun to be with. They liked to do the same things we did. We became great friends. We went everywhere together, swimming and sunbathing at the ocean, riding bicycles around Miami Beach, taking long evening walks down the beach, looking at the moon through the palm trees.

Each day, the hours from 10 to 12 a.m. were spent being interviewed about combat, checking records, going to doctors and dentists for checks, and to a psychiatrist to see if we were all there.

Bill and Helen seemed to have fun doing anything. They were like us. It was just wonderful to be alive. They found happiness everywhere.

As we rode our bicycles around Miami Beach, we would find coconuts and break them open. All four of us would drink the coconut milk. Officers would stop us on the street and in the park and want to take pictures of Elizabeth and of Helen. I didn't know whether to be jealous or happy about them wanting to take Elizabeth's picture all the time.

Elizabeth and I tried a deep sea fishing trip, one afternoon. I had insisted that we go. The Army had a PT boat rigged up for deep sea fishing. There were several couples on the boat with us. As soon as the boat broke out of the safe water reef, things went wild. There was a storm out at sea. The ocean swells were heavy. Water was above the boat, below the boat, and on both sides at the same time.

We were like a cork bobbing in that big ocean. Everyone was sea sick. I felt so sorry for Elizabeth that I didn't know what to do. I was sorry that I had made her go but I sure wasn't going to go

out there without her. I was getting woozie myself. Even the captain was worried. He said that the current was really pulling us out to sea and he was trying to turn us around and go back in. He had not wanted to go out when he heard what the sea was like. It took some time before he could get the boat back inside the protective reefs and into quiet water.

When Elizabeth got back to the hotel she complained that the whole building was moving.

The day before our beach hotel life ended, I was in a very special interview with a colonel. He began by saying I was eligible to train for an engineer's position on a B-29.

"You would keep your present rank until you finished training," he said. "Then you would be promoted to the rank of warrant officer."

I didn't know what a B-29 was. The colonel said, "It's a bomber, a very large bomber, larger than your B-24, and it's going to be used out in the Pacific Theater."

I asked, "Would it mean going back to combat?"

He said, "It could. You would have to give up your rights as a returnee to the Zone of Interior."

I wasn't feeling so brave or patriotic at the time.

"Can I discuss it with my wife?" I asked.

He nodded and said I had until tomorrow, my last day there, to make up my mind. "The choice is yours," he said.

I walked away saying to myself, "I knew all this luxury was leading up to something. If I say no, they will send me anyway."

Back at the hotel with Elizabeth, I tried to tell her about the offer, as soft as I could. She started crying, saying that I would have to go back to combat. "I don't think I can take any more of not knowing if you are dead or alive," she said.

Elizabeth finally made the decision for me. She said, "If you take this, but don't have to, I'll know you don't have any love for me. If the Army *makes* you take it, I'll try to make the best of it."

We lay on the bed together. Elizabeth rested her head on my arm, crying most of the night. I spent a miserable night thinking about the future. This was as hard as being in combat.

I knew I couldn't do without her. The next morning, I went back to the colonel's office and had a long talk with him. He said, "You will not be forced to accept B-29 duty, but if you do accept it, it could lead to a real future for you in the Air Force. There are not many B-24 engineers who are being offered this opportunity."

I knew that refusing the offer would blow my chances of ever becoming an officer. The conversation ended with my telling him I could not accept. The colonel stood up and said, "Okay, sergeant, that's your decision. I don't blame you for making it."

I thought, "Maybe some day the war will end and I'll be out of the Army." I sure didn't want to lose Elizabeth. I'd just have to take my chances for the next three years they said I could stay in the States before combat reassignment.

I went back to the hotel and told Elizabeth. It made her one happy girl. The next few days passed quickly, with a theater visit in the evening and all the things the hostess planned for us to do during the day.

The time came for us to leave Miami Beach. On October 15 we had orders to go to Keesler Field, Mississippi where I had gone to airplane mechanic school. Helen and Bill Smith were to leave the next day. They came down to the bus to see us off. We were to ride the bus together to the train station where we would board a train for Keesler Field.

Helen put her arms around me, as we were getting on the bus. She hugged me tight, and kissed me on the lips in front of Elizabeth and said, "Robbie, I love you. You have the wrong wife." This was really a surprise to me and even embarrassed me in front of Elizabeth. I said, "That is just Helen for you."

I would never know if she really meant it or not. They gave us their home address and asked us to keep in touch with them.

The Army was paying for our train transportation. They bought one Pullman berth for both Elizabeth and me to sleep in. I thought about the ticket agent in Memphis who wouldn't sell me only one Pullman berth on the way to Miami Beach. Elizabeth and I enjoyed the trip to Biloxi together. Traveling and sharing everything with someone you love, makes an ordinary trip a real adventure. Even when you don't know what's coming next.

The train pulled into the Biloxi station after dark on the evening of October 16. There were twenty-two returning air crew members aboard and about half of them had their wives with them. As we stepped off the train a lieutenant met us, told us to line up and be counted, then said, "Pick up your bags and get in the truck to Keesler Field."

I spoke up and said, "Lieutenant, some of us have our wives with us. We'd like to find a place for them to stay." The lieutenant said, "Sergeant, they will just have to find a place themselves." "Like hell they will," I said. He said, "What do you mean?" I said,

"When I find a hotel room for my wife, then I will report back to the field."

I picked up my bags and walked over to Elizabeth, took her by the arm and walked away. The other eight men with wives, all staff sergeants, did the same thing. The lieutenant was hollering all the time at us. We paid no attention to him.

I knew where the hotel was in downtown Biloxi. It wasn't a very long walk from the train station. All the sergeants and their wives walked together to the hotel. For some reason, our luck was with us. The hotel had enough rooms for all eight wives. I took Elizabeth to a room and then we had dinner. I made sure that she had enough money for a week and enough for transportation back to Memphis in case I didn't get back for a while. "I will get back to you soon," I said.

I sure didn't want to leave Elizabeth in a Biloxi hotel room. I held her tight to me. I had no idea what the Army was going to do next. I held and kissed Elizabeth like I was never going to see her again, then left for the airbase. I walked through the town and to the guard house at the gate. The MP told me where I should go.

The lieutenant was mad as hell about us walking away from him, according to the corporal, in the building where I went to report. The lieutenant was keeping everyone in a barracks behind the headquarters building until everyone had come back to the base. It was late in the night before all the sergeants got in.

The lieutenant and a captain showed up at the barracks after the last sergeant reported in. The captain said that we had been insubordinate to the lieutenant and an accounting would have to be made for it later.

I heard the lieutenant ask the captain, "What are we going to do with this bunch?" Twenty-two of us had come in. The captain said, "Hell, I don't know. This is the first group of returnees we've received. We don't have orders telling us what to do with them. Just send them to the basic barracks, for now."

We were told to pick up our baggage and put them in the truck. Then we would march to our barracks to sleep for the night.

"Sir, if you want the damn bags in the truck, put them in yourself, or have someone put them in for you. We've taken enough of your abuse."

It was the master sergeant in our group who had said it.

The captain was shocked and didn't know what to do. The lieutenant took us to a barracks, with us walking behind him. When we got to the barracks the lieutenant left us. We all picked out a

bunk, and lay around. It wasn't long before a truck showed up with our bags. Three PFCs unloaded them in front of the barracks and drove off.

The next morning we were restricted to our barracks. The second day, we were not allowed to leave the area except to walk to the mess hall. We were assigned to do kitchen police duty that afternoon, until late in the night. There was a phone near the mess hall.

I called the hotel and talked to Elizabeth. I told her to get on a bus and go back to Memphis. Just as soon as I got things straightened out here, I would call her to come back. She wanted to stay. I convinced her that Memphis was the best place for her. I told her what they were doing with us. I had to assure her that she would come back. I knew we didn't have enough money for her to live in the hotel very long.

Elizabeth said she would leave the next morning, for me not to worry about her. I was relieved to know Elizabeth would be safe.

We did one hell of a job on kitchen police. This bunch of sergeants did little or nothing but goof off. The mess sergeant was about to pull his hair out. We all outranked him anyway. The third day, they even tried to put us through calisthenic drills.

## General Makes Unexpected Call

A general walked in the barracks on the fourth day. We were all lying around the barracks. Nobody saw the general's car when it drove up in front. Someone said, "Attention." We all stood up.

The general said, "As you were, men." We were all standing in front of our bunks at attention.

The general walked through the barracks, talking to each of us. He asked about our combat duty and shook hands with each one of us personally. He went up to the master sergeant, put his arm around him and said, "I'm glad to see that you are alive and well." It seemed they had served together in combat somewhere.

The master sergeant looked too old for the Army Air Force. I later learned that they were related in some way to each other, and the sergeant had contacted him about our troubles at Keesler.

The general asked to see our permanent party passes. We told him that we didn't have a pass; everyone was confined to the area and we had been put on kitchen police duty.

He shook his head and made apologies to us for the way things were going. "This will all be corrected," he said. "This base has been operated as a basic training school too long. You men are the first returnees to come here for processing. They don't know how to deal with you. I'll get it all straightened out."

As the general was leaving, he turned and said, "I salute you men for the service that you have given to your country." The general left the barracks with his friend, the master sergeant.

In less than a hour, an officer came in and gave each of us permanent party passes. He explained that there had been a mix up in orders. "Everything will be straightened out," he said. "If anyone wants to live off the post, it can be arranged. Those who are married will be eligible for quarters on the post as housing becomes available. Each of you will be assigned to a job duty as soon as some details are worked out." The lieutenant hesitated, then left the barracks.

The general's visit had changed things fast. I took off, looking for a phone to call Elizabeth in Memphis. She picked up the phone and said, "Hello." After one hour of talking to each other, we agreed that she should come to Biloxi. She would arrive the following Sunday evening, November 6. I would meet her at the hotel downtown where she had stayed before. I would make the reservations. Everything was set.

It was evident to me now that they didn't know exactly what to do with us. The next day, they assigned me to the aircraft mechanical school. At the school I met some of the same instructors that I had studied under when I went through the school before. To make the time pass, I tried to be a good student. My grades were four and a half points, out of a possible five.

I rushed off to Biloxi to the Tivoli Hotel to meet Elizabeth on the afternoon of November 6. I was really excited. Things were working out. Elizabeth and I could soon be living together.

I arrived at the Tivoli Hotel at about 3 p.m. and asked the room clerk if Mrs. Elizabeth Robinson had checked in. He said, "Yes, about an hour ago." Her room was number 304. I rushed to the elevator and up to her floor and down the hall to knock on the door.

There was no answer. I called out, "Elizabeth!" and continued knocking on the door. Fear began to come over me.

"Where could Elizabeth be?" I wondered. I went back to the elevator and asked the elevator boy if he had seen a pretty blond girl, about five foot, six inches tall and weighing about 115 pounds. He said, "I sure did. I took her up to the third floor." "Did you see her leaving, or going out?" I asked. "No," he said.

I was really getting worried now. I looked around the lobby and went back up to the room 304. I knocked and knocked and called, "Elizabeth!" Still no answer.

I went back to the lobby and asked the room clerk for a key to the room. "I can't find my wife," I said. The room clerk said, "I can't give you a key." I tried to explain that I was her husband. "If I don't get the key, I'll go and get the military police."

The room clerk finally gave me a key to the room. I went back up to 304 and opened the door and called, "Elizabeth!" No one was in the room. No one had been in the room. The bed was untouched. No clothes were hanging in the closet.

I left and closed the door. I didn't know what to do.

Fear was now about to take over. I knew that I had better go call the police. I walked on down the hall to the elevator. Before I got on, I turned and called out into the hallway, "Elizabeth!" I heard her voice saying, "Harold? Is that you?" The voice was coming from another room. I was so surprised and shocked that I could hardly answer. "Elizabeth, where are you?" I said.

Elizabeth opened the door to room number 302 and looked out. She was standing there in a blue negligee that was so thin and soft. I was so happy that I had found her that tears came to my eyes. I ran and grabbed her and held her tightly to me. I couldn't stop kissing her. I finally asked, "Why are you in room 302?" "That's the room they gave me," she said. I looked at the key. It said 304 on the key. Elizabeth said, "All I know is, the bellboy opened the door with this key and it fit the lock. He put the bags in here."

I got her clothes together and took them to room 304. Elizabeth had taken a bath in room 302. I went back, picked up all her cosmetics that she had put out in the bath room, cleaned up the room a little and went back to room 304.

I had been so afraid that something would happen to her, traveling alone. I never dreamed that we would have such a hard time finding each other after she got in the hotel. In all my combat, I had never felt the fear that came over me when I couldn't find Elizabeth. I didn't take my eyes off of her or let her get three feet away from me until I went back to school the next morning.

During the next two weeks, we found a room in a boarding house not far from the hotel. It was less expensive and just as nice. We met another returnee couple living there, Staff Sergeant Carl Adoyhson and his wife. Elizabeth now had someone to visit, shop with and spend her free time with while I was at the base. Things were beginning to work out a little better.

Carl and his wife were a nice couple to be around. We all seemed to have something in common. He and I were happy to be alive.

Carl had flown during the invasion period. He had bailed out over France. He told me that all hell had broken loose when his ship was hit by flak. He jumped out when the plane started down.

"I didn't think about pulling the rip cord," he said. "Everything seemed so peaceful and quiet as I fell. I looked down. I watched my ship hit the ground. It was so quiet that I was almost enjoying the fall. I looked down and I saw a cow and a black horse below me. I suddenly realized that, if I was close enough to the ground to see the difference between a cow and a black horse, I had better pull the rip cord on my parachute."

Carl said that when he pulled the rip cord, his chute popped open. "It jerked every bone in my body," he said. "I was hurting everywhere. When I hit the ground, my flight boots busted and came off. I was just sitting there in the mud. Two men came running to me and I was trying to pull out my .45 automatic. But they turned out to be French, and they helped me to get back to the American lines."

Since he had bailed out of a damaged airplane, he had become a member of the Caterpillar Club and wore the badge below his wings. He had only flown five missions when he went down. He was so thankful that God had let him live to be back with his wife. I could only agree to that.

## Housekeeping, With Love

I was coming home to Elizabeth every evening at five o'clock and going out to the base at six the next morning. We strolled along the beach in the afternoons and in the evening we went out to eat at a restaurant.

It wasn't until November 26, after being back in aircraft mechanical school for a month, that I was transferred to cargo

school for C-46, C-47, and C-54 aircraft at Keesler. I was given a job as assistant senior instructor of the school.

I was required to take a crash course in instructor training and management. In the class with me was Cook who had flown with me in combat as engineer on Lieutenant Wright's crew. I walked up to Cook and said, "William E. Cook, where in the world did you come from?" Cook said, "I just came in a few days ago. They assigned me to cargo." He was assigned to Inspection One. I was going to work in Inspection Two. "This is old home week at Keesler," I said.

Cook said he had married his girlfriend in Miami. She was in Biloxi with him.

My thoughts went back to the night we were sitting in the darkness outside our hut in Tibenham. We had asked God for his help, to let Cook return to his girlfriend, Jean, so he could marry her. Now it had all come to pass. God had kept his promises to us, when He spoke to us as we sat on the coal box that night.

God had kept us and helped us. Now we were both senior instructors in cargo aircraft, and our wives were here with us in Biloxi.

"Thank you, God," I thought.

The old instructors I had known as a student were being shipped out to combat duty all over the world. Returnees were coming in to take their places.

Some instructors were bitter when they left for overseas and were replaced by combat fighter pilots and bomber crews who set out to change the whole atmosphere around the base. The returnees remembered the pressures they had to endure when they went through school on their way to combat.

The atmosphere on the airfield was changing from heavy formality to something relaxed and informal. There was more consideration shown for the students you worked with and they seemed to do better and respect each other more. It really made a difference. Even the military police were being replaced by old war zone personnel.

I had a bunk in my barracks but I had a permanent party pass and was spending all my nights with Elizabeth at the boarding house. I had applied for living quarters at the airfield for both of us but it wasn't available yet.

On December 18, I was told that my living off the base had been approved. Elizabeth and I found a small duplex, with one room and a bath, near the airfield. The house was a square box, a

tiny old Biloxi house at 703 Iroquois Street. It had been divided into two small apartments, each with a small bedroom and kitchen and a shared bath room. Our side had one small bedroom and a very small kitchen, with a two burner oil stove, and an ice box. The rent was twenty-eight dollars a month which was pretty high. Most places were renting for fifteen dollars but there was a housing shortage and we felt lucky to have found this place.

The trouble with Biloxi was: too many soldiers for such a little town, though there were not as many soldiers in Biloxi now as there had been when I was here the first time. There wasn't room to stand in the streets then. Now, autos moved along the streets, and you could actually walk on the sidewalks.

Even the mood of the town was changing for the better with all the returning combat personnel. However, some of the Old Biloxi people were still trying to make a fortune off of the soldiers by raising their prices.

Two days before Christmas, our first one together, I was notified I would be paid a special ration for rent and food. I did not have very much money left from my ninety-six dollar monthly paycheck of December 1, after paying the Biloxi Hotel, the house bills and a deposit on our apartment on Iroquois. I was no longer allowed to eat at the mess hall or take any food from the base without paying for it.

The next day was Christmas Eve. The approval to live off the base actually put us in a temporary money bind. Elizabeth had some money in a savings account in Memphis but she couldn't get to it, with us in Biloxi.

We had less than a dollar and fifty cents.

Here it was Christmas Eve, with New Year's Eve coming, and it was twelve more days to payday - with a dollar and a half between us. We had enough kerosene to cook and heat the room for that time - if we were careful with it. We sure weren't going to have food. I wasn't sure what we would do.

Elizabeth just didn't seem to be worried about it at all. She said we would work it out some way. We walked around the beach in the afternoons and were still so very much in love that nothing really mattered but the two of us.

I took stock of our food. We had less than a dozen eggs, half a loaf of bread, two cans of pork and beans, a can of peaches. This had to last us for the next twelve days through Christmas. It was cool outside so we wouldn't need ice for the ice box. Our pride wouldn't let us tell anyone we were broke, or let us try to borrow

any money from them. We were going to tough it out through Christmas and New Year's Eve.

We still had our love to live on.

On our walks around the beach I began to pick up some small sea shells. There were very few pretty shells left on the Biloxi beach but I would find one, now and then. At the base I got some wire and began to put them together. I made a sea shell necklace for Elizabeth for a Christmas present. I put a wire hook on it and coated the shells with airplane dope which made the shells nice and shiny.

I found myself asking for God to help us again and to keep us safe and happy together.

## The Gift

On Christmas morning we woke up in each others arms. That was about the way we always slept. With a big good morning kiss, I reached under the bed and got the necklace of sea shells and gave it to Elizabeth. You would have thought I had given her everything in the world. It made her so happy.

She got up and went to the dresser drawer, opened it and pulled out a little box and gave it to me. I opened it. Elizabeth had made me a silk white scarf and had put my initials on it. It was beautiful. It pleased me so much that she had made it herself with a needle and thread. The initials were beautifully done. I hugged and kissed her and held her so tight. It couldn't have been a nicer Christmas morning.

We were getting a little hungry. So we decided to get up and take a walk around the Biloxi beach.

Someone knocked on our door. I opened it and there stood Cook, my old crew buddy, and his wife, Jean. They came in. Cook said, "Would you two have Christmas dinner with us at our place about 2 o'clock?" I said, "Well -" Cook said, "Jean's fixing up a big turkey. She's going to do all the trimmings. We sure would like for you to have Christmas dinner with us. If you can make it."

"We'll be there," I said.

When they left, I told Elizabeth, with tears in my eyes, "God in heaven really does answer prayers." There was no doubt in my mind.

We dressed and walked down to the beach. Cook's apartment was in an old building on the ocean side of the sea wall. There was a large number of piers that had been converted into small apartments. You could look out their window and see that you were over water.

It turned out to be a wonderful day. Jean wrapped up a lot of leftover turkey and food to take home with us when we left. She said, "We don't have any place to keep it. It will just spoil if you don't take it." The next two days we ate a lot of turkey and dressing.

Three days later, the Biloxi lady who lived in the house next to us, came over with a large platter of fish that her husband had caught. She said, "Would you two like to have it? It's all cooked and ready to eat."

The Old Biloxi residents were hard to get to know. We had only spoken to her a few times as we passed her home. No one had moved into the tiny apartment next to us, so she was our only neighbor. She became very nice to us and she and Elizabeth became good friends.

January 2 finally dawned - pay day at last. When I went to get my pay, the finance officer said I would have to go to the finance office and take care of something before I would get paid. I ran to the office and reported. The finance officer told me that I had been paid too much in Dakar, Africa, months ago. He said I would have to pay it back. I told him, "I had my finance records checked three times since I have been in the States and they were all right."

"That may be so, sergeant," he said, "but you're in Biloxi now and I am in charge here."

I said, "Sir, I have to get paid. I live off the base and I don't have any money."

He said, "You returnees need everything."

I sure didn't want any more trouble with him than I already had. So I kept my mouth shut. The lieutenant walked over to a captain and they talked for a few minutes. Then he came back to me.

"There is a way I can give you some money and make the books balance," he said.

He got out some papers and said, "I will give you a note to sign, saying that you will pay the Army 250 dollars at a later date. Then I will give you your 400 dollars now. This will straighten out my books and it will pay you last month's pay." I didn't understand

what he was doing, or even talking about. All I heard was, I was going to be paid 400 dollars.

I signed the money voucher and the pay roll. The lieutenant counted out the money for me. Four hundred dollars. I took it and ran before someone changed their mind.

When I got home that evening, I showed all the money to Elizabeth. She couldn't believe I had been paid so much. We sat on the bed and counted it several times. The first thing we did was go to the store on the base and buy enough food for a month. I thought, "Never again will we let ourselves get as low on food or money as we did this Christmas."

During the next few weeks, we often went to a little church down the street from us to thank God for what he had done for us. I was into a routine of going to work every morning at 7 o'clock. I walked to the base and to the hangar where I was teaching school. I walked back home at 4:30 each afternoon.

Elizabeth was always waiting for me. She had dinner ready. After dinner we would walk around the beach and come back home.

We were still in love as much as the day we were married.

One evening, as we walked on the beach, Elizabeth brought up the subject of children and babies. She said to me very seriously, "Darling, we have been together almost every day since September. This is January and I am not pregnant." We walked a little farther down the beach and she said, "I thought sure that I would be pregnant by now, and be carrying your baby. I am beginning to think something is wrong." I had not tried to keep Elizabeth from getting pregnant. I thought about it a while. "Maybe there is something wrong," I thought.

We talked about it all the way home. We really wanted a child to become part of our lives. I thought that was what life was all about: having a family to love and care for.

The next day, I took off from work and went to the hospital and talked with a doctor. He asked me what kind of work I had been doing. I told him.

"When was the last time you flew at high altitude?" he said. I said it was in June of 1944. He asked me about Elizabeth. I told him all I could. He said, "She sounds normal. There seems to be nothing wrong with her." He patted me on the shoulder. "Don't worry, sergeant. It sometimes takes more than six months to father a baby, after flying high altitude - plus all the changes you have made so fast. I am sure that everything will work out in the next

few months. If not, bring you wife in for a physical and we will make some tests."

When I left, I felt a little better. At least now I had something to tell Elizabeth. When I told her that night what the doctor had said, she seemed a bit relieved but I was not sure she was convinced that high altitude flying was the problem.

I had to leave Elizabeth during the last week of January for a flight to Puerto Rico. I had to crew a C-46 to Mobile, Alabama to pick up some cargo to take to San Juan. I would go as the flight engineer. They paid you extra for flying. This would keep the extra money coming in.

I didn't want to leave Elizabeth alone. She pretended she didn't mind. "The next door neighbors will watch out for me," she said.

I left early in the morning, flew along the beautiful Mississippi coastline to Mobile. This was the first time for me to fly as engineer on a C-46. I was very careful about everything I did. I followed every step in the manual and check list. We landed in Mobile and picked up a few cases. Then we took off for San Juan. We stayed overnight and then returned to Biloxi the next evening, empty except for a case of rum for some officer.

I walked home from the airfield and back into Elizabeth's arms. It had been only one night but I felt like I had been away from her a very long time.

Elizabeth said she had never noticed the big roaches before, like she had while I was gone. "The ants were eating the lamp cord covering," she said. She showed me how big they were. I knew she had not felt safe while I was gone. I had never heard her complain about anything before. Elizabeth had a way of making everything turn out good, regardless of how bad things really were.

Cook and I were in one of the hangars, one afternoon in late February, when we heard the most shocking story of our lives.

We were talking to a young officer, just back from England. I asked if he had known anyone in the 445th and what happened to our pilot, Wright, after we left.

"Well, your pilot made captain and finished his missions," he said. He hesitated. "You flew in the 445th?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you heard about them?" he said.

"Heard what?" I said.

He didn't say anything. Again I said, "Heard what?"

He said, "The whole bomb group was almost wiped out. All 37 of the 703rd Squadrons planes went down. On a raid on Kassel, Germany. Last September 27."

We stood there, stunned. We had heard the rumor about that raid but now this officer who was just back from over there, was telling us it was so.

A chill went through my mind. I wondered if Tennessee Dotty was flying that day.

Cook and I put our tools down and walked outside the hangar.

## The Greatest Gift

Lying in bed, a few nights later, Elizabeth said, "I think I'm pregnant, Harold. I think I'm going to have a baby." I said, "Let's go see a doctor tomorrow and find out." She said, "No. Let's just wait another month and then we will go to the doctor."

Everything was just perfect. Our love for each other was greater than ever, if that was possible. We didn't have anything but each other and now we might have a baby on the way to love.

The next few weeks, we continued to walk around the beach every evening, as soon as I came home.

On the first of March, I had to make a flight to maintain my flying status, to get the extra pay. I was assigned to the crew of an A-26 twin-engine, low-level bomber, on a round trip to an airfield in Texas. It would require me being away from Elizabeth for two nights.

A couple had moved into the other side of our apartment duplex, Amy and Norman Gray, from Texas. Norman was a sergeant and worked on the base. I felt better about making a bomber flight to Texas. Elizabeth would have someone to talk to and pass the time while I was gone.

This was the first time that I had flown in an A-26. The ship flew well. There wasn't much to do but sit on the flight deck. We landed at Shepard Field, Texas. There were large bombers lined up everywhere. I had never seen one like them. They were about three times as big as a B-24 and only had one big tail. The tail looked kind of like a B-29 tail. There were also several B-29s on the field.

I asked what kind of bomber it was and was told that it was an upgraded version of a B-24. It had only one tail and was even bigger than a B-29. It was called a B-32.

"It will replace our B-29s in the Pacific," our ground crew chief said. "We have one hundred of these ships here on the field."

I had never heard of a B-32 before. It was being built by Consolidated.

I was fascinated by the B-32 when I went through it. It was such an improvement over the B-24s I had flown.

I spent the night on a couch in the operations building, and the next morning we took off for Biloxi. As soon as I had the A-26 secured, I rushed home as fast as my feet could take me. The flight to Texas only required one night away. Elizabeth was surprised to see me back so soon. Everything had gone well with her. She was my only concern. I sure didn't want anything to happen to her.

In the middle of March I took Elizabeth to the Army hospital on the base to see a doctor. I had to wait for her for several hours. When she came out she was crying. I was scared to death. "What happened?" I said. She said, "Nothing." I said, "There must be. What is it?" As we walked on, Elizabeth said, "I'll never go back there to that hospital, ever again. There is not a real doctor in the bunch of them. I have never been treated like that by a doctor. I don't think they know what they are doing. Most of them are just kids. Because we are enlisted personnel, not officers, they act like they are little gods. They are not even decent to a woman."

I wanted to go back to the hospital, right then, and do something about it, but Elizabeth wouldn't be any more specific.

Elizabeth said, "I just will never go back there." I kept trying to find out what the doctors had done, or what they had said to her. She just wouldn't say any more.

I found a doctor in Biloxi who was supposed to be good. His name was Doctor Treudore. I went to his office and talked with him. He was an older man and was very nice. I told him about what had happened at the base hospital and how Elizabeth would not go back. He said, "I've heard of some improper procedures there. I'm sure they will be corrected soon." That's all he would say.

Dr. Treudore told me that he would attend Elizabeth through the birth of our child, and the cost would be ninety dollars, including office visits, medication, and hospital costs. He said we would use the Biloxi Hospital for delivery. I made an appointment there for Elizabeth for the next day.

The next day, the doctor examined Elizabeth with me there, and said that she was a perfect and healthy young lady. She would have no trouble bearing a child. When we left, Elizabeth said, "I sure do like Dr. Treudore. He is a real doctor."

Everything was working out. The cost for complete care was unbelievably low - and Elizabeth was happy.

In March, Elizabeth began to worry about what the renters were doing to our home in Memphis. I got a four-day pass. The next morning, we were riding a Trailway Bus north to Memphis.

We were both so very happy and so much in love. We sat in the bus holding hands, close to each other all the way.

About one hundred miles from Memphis, the bus engine stopped running. The bus coasted over to the side of the road and stopped. The driver and one of the passengers got out. I could hear them talking about the ignition, carburetor, and fuel pump. Several people on the bus got out, one by one, and started fooling with the engine. The driver came and stuck his head in the door and said, "Folks, it looks like we'll have to wait for the next bus from Jackson, Mississippi. Looks like about a three-hour wait."

They were not able to start the engine.

"Well, this is really something," I told Elizabeth, "and us with only a four-day pass. This sure is going to blow our time in Memphis. We won't be there until late tonight."

A lady sitting across the aisle of the bus said, "Isn't that an aircraft mechanic's emblem on your sleeve?" I said, "Yes, mam." She said, very loud so everyone could hear her, "Well, please, go out there, and take a look at that engine. I know an aircraft mechanic can get it started."

I didn't want to get involved. Elizabeth said, "Please, look at it for us." I got out of the seat, and walked out of the bus, and back to the engine. They had the cover door up.

A passenger who was standing there said he was just a part-time mechanic. He explained, "We've got fuel, and it's getting to the carburetor. We're not getting a spark to the spark plugs." I began to diagnose the electrical ignition system. There was power to the distributor, but none from the cap to the plugs. With a pin knife, I scratched the surface between the rotor contact and the rivet which held the blade. I was guessing that it had become insulated by the cleaning fluid used to dry it with. That was the problem. It had gotten wet when we went through a lot of fog and rain, back up the road.

The mechanic put the cap back on the distributor after I scraped it good. The driver cranked the engine and it started. As I walked back in the bus, everyone started clapping, and congratulating me, as though I were some kind of hero. I only wanted to get to Memphis. The lady across the aisle said, "I knew you could do it. I told your wife so."

We arrived in Memphis and took a taxi to my aunt's home. We had a bank account so Elizabeth wanted to see if we could buy a car. I went to the gas ration office, and told the man there that I wanted to take my auto back to Biloxi. I said it had been sitting up during the war, and had not been used. The man asked me, "How much gas you need?" I told him, "At least forty gallons." He handed me several books of ration stamps, and said, "That will be enough gas to get you there - and back." I rushed back to Elizabeth, and told her that I had enough ration gas stamps. "Now, let's find a car with some tires on it." We went to a used car lot, and looked at several cars. None had good tires and there were no new tires available in the stores. It looked like a losing cause.

After visiting several lots, we finally found a small Ford coupe. It was just like the one we had owned before. The salesman said, "I'll see that it has some good tires on it. Let me go get the license, and title for you."

We bought the car for 500 dollars cash. It was the perfect car for us. We picked it up the next day and filled it with gasoline

Off to Biloxi we started in our new car. Everything in Memphis had worked out fine but we didn't have much money left in our savings account. My aunt had let us stay with her and had furnished all our meals. We had seen all the family. Everyone was happy about us going to have a baby.

We made it back to Biloxi, and really enjoyed the trip. We had stopped on the road side a couple of times and eaten food that my aunt had fixed for us. We had a real picnic each time we stopped. We were happy together. The world around us was beautiful. We could have been the only two people in the world.

We made several trips to the Gulf and back with the ration stamps I got in Memphis. I diluted my gasoline with benzine and coal oil to make it last longer. The car smoked heavy but it would run on the mixture. I just had to clean the plugs quite often. It was a nice luxury to have a car and to take a ride in it, instead of having to walk everywhere we went.

April came and went and Elizabeth was getting bigger and prettier. She was a very pretty pregnant woman. She ordered a

complete baby kit from a Sears catalogue. The catalogue said it was everything you need to have for a new baby. She ordered several dozen extra diapers. We found a second-hand bassinet and bought it. Elizabeth bought a large oval cloth basket. She padded and covered it with blue material.

Elizabeth kept happy and busy, getting everything ready for the arrival of our baby. She wasn't going to wait until the last minute for anything. We seemed to be buying some little something every week for the baby. I said, "We don't know if it will be a boy or a girl." Elizabeth said, "We will have whatever a boy *or* girl would use."

Elizabeth was having no problems at all with carrying the baby. She was happy all the time. She would do anything that I wanted to do. We walked around Biloxi every evening, went surfing and lay on the beach. Once in a while, when we thought we could afford it, we would go to a picture show. Elizabeth seemed to be more active than ever. We were always doing something or had a project to work on for the baby.

We had it all figured out: the baby would arrive in October. It was now the first week in May. Visits to the doctor in Biloxi now had to be made every two weeks. Dr. Treudore said, "There's nothing wrong and I want to keep it that way."

I thanked him for charging us so little. He said he felt a responsibility to repay the airmen who had fought in Europe. "I am of French descent," he said, "and I have many relatives living in France."

It seemed that, at this point in the war, cargo airplanes were in more demand. I began getting officers as students. Some had flown on twin-engine and four-engine bombers before being transferred to the cargo school to fly C-46s and the four-engine C-54s.

I was interested in learning more about the C-54. I was spending as much time reading and going through inspections on the C-54 as I could. I had to do it in my spare time, when I was not teaching C-46 aircraft inspections. I felt the C-54 would become the work horse of the air, one of these days, in both passenger and cargo flying. It was a good ship.

The evening of May 8, I was at home with Elizabeth.

Suddenly there was a kind of roar. I had never heard such a roar before. It went on for several minutes. We went out on the front porch but couldn't see anything. We thought it must be

something on the ocean. It sounded like a distant earthquake. We had no idea what was happening.

## It's Over

The lady next door came running over to us as we stood on the porch. She was all excited. "Did you hear? Did you hear? It's over! It's over! Turn your radio on!"

"What is over?" I said?

The war in Europe is over!" she said. I ran inside and turned the radio on. I heard an announcer saying, "It is now official. At 7:01 p.m. Central time tonight, the war in Europe was over."

Elizabeth and I held each other and screamed, "It's over."

I will never forget the dull roar we heard coming from Keesler Field and Biloxi. Everyone was screaming and hollering at one time and it created a sound wave so powerful we could feel it.

I had lived to see the end. Elizabeth and I kissed and held each other and said, "Thank you, God."

"If Japan would make peace, our baby could be born in a world without war, and live in peace," Elizabeth said.

That night, Elizabeth fell asleep with her head on my shoulder. I lay beside her, thinking of all the men in the bomber crews who had flown in combat with me in our group - men who did not live to see this day. The Deweys, Doggetts, Bronsteins, and all the others - their names went through my mind.

Lying there, I thought, "This is their day. I wish they all could have lived to be as happy as I am, lying here with my beautiful wife." I thought of the fifty-seven airplanes that were lost in our group while I was flying - 570 men gone, in such a short time. How many more had been lost since I had left the battle scene?

God had allowed me to live and come home to Elizabeth. He had allowed us this period of happiness we now shared. I lay there most of the night with my eyes open and wet. I held my wife close to me while she slept.

The next few days, everyone on the base was talking about victory in Europe. In cargo, we were thinking there would be an even bigger need for cargo crews to fly the long battle supply routes across the Pacific Ocean.

Elizabeth was transforming our tiny apartment into a comfortable place for the two of us - and maybe the three of us soon. Elizabeth had padded the baby basket and made it a blue cover. It was very pretty sitting beside our bed.

Natural gas had been installed in our little apartment so we would not have to go out and buy kerosene all the time. I started building kitchen cabinets from some boards I took off an old fence. I painted them white and Elizabeth made curtains to hang in the front instead of doors.

Our auto had extended our range of recreation up and down the Gulf Coast, from Ocean Springs to Gulfport and Pass Christian. For security reasons, I had to paint the headlights black with just one little clear hole in the middle for the light. Elizabeth always liked to explore and find new beach spots along the ocean. We were getting to where we could afford a picture show once a week, with popcorn. Things were looking up.

Cook and Jean, and Norman and Amey were coming over often. Sometimes we played cards; sometimes we walked down the beach. We all loved to see the sunset on the ocean. Elizabeth was getting bigger and was carrying herself well. She looked very pretty. Her happiness seemed to be what was making everything work out the way it was.

We were really living in a shack when you stood outside and looked at it. The house must have been built in the swamps, back in the late 1800s. It was only 500 feet from a bayou which had alligators in it. But it was our home and we loved it.

The atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6 and on Nagasaki three days later. The end suddenly came in sight for the war with Japan.

On August 10, the cargo school was reduced to two shifts. I was assigned to the evening shift as assistant senior instructor. I would not get home until about 11 each evening. Elizabeth would be alone until quite late. She was disappointed by that. We had enjoyed our evenings together and looked forward to them. Our pleasant routine was going to be changed.

On August 14, Japan surrendered. The news was not nearly as exciting as the German surrender. You almost expected it after that first atom bomb fell on Hiroshima.

In September there was a rumor - and most rumors usually turned out to be true - that the Air Force had developed a point system to be used in discharging personnel. The more points you had, the sooner you got out of the military. Suddenly, everyone

was trying to get a record of their war experience and the discharge points they had earned. I wrote our group adjutant, Captain Rudolph J. Bursic, asking him to verify my records and anything else that he knew about that would help me to obtain points.

I could only think about getting out of the Air Force and taking Elizabeth back to Memphis and starting our life over again, together. By return mail, Captain Bursic verified my records. I also had kept all my old records and citations and orders.

The returnees were all afraid that the non-combat administrative personnel at Keesler Field might throw out some of their combat records, in order to block their early departure from the Army. We had caused some of their friends to be reassigned to combat zone duty, disrupting their little kingdoms. It might not have been true but the feeling was among most of the combat veterans. Some of the returnees' records clearly had been lost or altered without the combat man's knowledge or approval. They had changed some of their test records on some returnees, to down grade them. This blocked the veterans from various advancements and kept them from getting certain jobs.

I was called to cargo school headquarters. They asked if I would like to stay on, either as an Air Force instructor or as a civilian instructor. I would be given a CAF-9 rating if I stayed on as a civilian instructor; and I would keep my current rank if I chose to stay on with the military. Either way, I would do the same thing I was doing now. I was given a day to make up my mind.

It was near the end of September. Elizabeth and I had been thinking our baby might be born at home in Memphis. It was due October 15.

I told Elizabeth about the cargo school offer. "I just want us to go home and start over, Harold," she said. "Don't you?"

"That's really what I want," I said.

The next day I walked down to headquarters and told them I wanted to get out of the Army and go home. I was introduced to a Trans World Airlines representative from St. Louis. In the conversation with him, he asked me if I would be interested in training to become a TWA flight engineer.

I said I wasn't sure. He said we would need to move to St. Louis, if I joined them. As a TWA flight engineer, I would be flying a lot and I would be away from Elizabeth and the baby much of the time.

The man gave me his business card. "Look me up if you get out of the Army. You may want to change your mind."

# A New Beginning

I couldn't see myself being away from Elizabeth very much. "She will always be first in my life," I thought. I told Elizabeth we wouldn't be going to St. Louis. She was very happy because all she wanted to do was go home to Memphis.

I was called to headquarters. They couldn't find all my records. They didn't know where they could have gone. Fortunately, I had kept records of everything: all my flying time, combat missions, awards, diplomas, school records, service, and decorations. I had them certified by Captain Bursic, our group adjutant.

The record office had really tried to screw it up but, after several meetings, everything was finally certified. I had earned more than enough points toward discharge. I would not leave the office until they returned my records to me.

I received orders a few days later to report to Montgomery, Alabama on October 15. The evening before, I asked a neighbor if she would watch out for Elizabeth and see that she got to the hospital if the baby started to arrive. I would not be back until late on October 16. Elizabeth kept telling me that she would not have the baby until I got back with a discharge from the Army Air Force. I kept trying to tell her, "The doctor said the baby would already be here. He thinks it's now four days overdue." Elizabeth said, "I don't care what he said. I will not have this baby while you are gone. I am going to wait until you come back from Montgomery with a discharge from the Army. Don't you worry. That is what I am going to do."

I knew the baby was going to come while I was gone. The lady next door said, "Don't worry. I'll take care of Elizabeth."

When I got in the car to drive to Montgomery, I knew I had to drive fast but the old tires were not good. I hugged and kissed Elizabeth through the window of the car, not wanting to leave her. She told me to hurry back to her as a civilian. "I'll be waiting for you, and then we'll go to the hospital and have the baby." That was really in her mind: not to have the baby until I returned.

I arrived in Montgomery after dark. The military police on the gate tried to be helpful. Everyone in the squadron was very polite. The next morning, I was up early and at the mess hall. Everything was going like clock work. Combat records check, physical examination, lecture on civilian life for the future, finance records, and separation pay. The entire day moved on without a delay or a hitch of any kind.

I was on needles and pins, thinking about Elizabeth at home by herself. I had thought I would have my discharge papers and be on my way home by nightfall. I tossed and turned in the Army bunk all night, thinking about everything that was happening at one time.

At 10 a.m. on October 16, forty-one returnees were called out for a formal formation. We were all on our best behavior. We looked sharp. I think we were afraid we might not be discharged.

A colonel made a speech. Then he came along the ranks, shaking hands with each one of us and giving us an Honorable Discharge, a Citation from General Arnold, and papers separating us from the military.

The colonel returned to the front of the formation and said, "Gentlemen, as an officer of the United States Army Air Force, I salute you, and I salute what you did for your country. Your country salutes you. Now, I wish you a safe journey home. You are dismissed."

I had completed what my "friends and neighbors" had asked me to do, three years and one month ago.

I could only think now of one thing: I've got to get to Biloxi as fast as I can. Several of the airmen - civilians now - knew that I had a car. They wanted to share the expenses and ride to Biloxi with me. I told them that I had only a Ford coup. "I can't take but two of you with me," I said. "The problem is: which two?"

I ended up taking five and myself. Two rode in the turtle trunk. Three rode in the front seat with me. Two more wanted to ride on the rear bumper. I refused to let them do it. "I think it

would be unsafe, considering the distance we have to go," I said. The six of us piled in and headed for Biloxi.

The old car was doing okay. It knew that it had a load, but we were going to make it. We went through several rain storms, and the two in the back trunk got pretty wet. They didn't care. They just grinned. They were going home.

As we drove into Mobile in another rain shower, the two in the trunk were really getting soaked but they still wanted to go on. We filled up the car with gasoline and kept driving.

It wasn't long before we were on the coastal highway and approaching Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Our right rear tire blew out.

"This is just our luck," I thought. There was a spare tire in the trunk. It was smooth but in fair condition. It would still hold air. I pulled to the side of the road. Almost before I could open the door and get out, my five passengers had the tire off and the spare tire on. The tire was changed almost before I could get around to that side of the car. They all worked together like clock work. They put everything back in place and were hollering, "Let's go, lets go." I got back in and said, "That was the fastest tire change that ever took place on the face of the earth."

We were off and running again. We began to see the ocean from the highway and it made us feel like we were already back home in Biloxi. We were all getting excited. We pulled into Biloxi at 6 o'clock. I let everyone out of the car at the Light House on the beach highway, and turned down the road to my house.

I drove up to the house and ran to the door. Everything looked too quiet. I opened the door and there stood Elizabeth, waiting for me. I hugged and kissed her. She said, "I am so glad you are back. Now I can have the baby." I went next door to tell the lady that I was home and to thank her for watching out for Elizabeth. She said, "When the baby starts to arrive, come get me. I'll be glad to go to the hospital with you."

It sure made me feel good to have someone near who seemed to care for us. Elizabeth and I would not have to face the baby's arrival all by ourselves. I was the one who needed the support. Elizabeth seemed not to be worried about anything; it all seemed natural to her.

I knew Elizabeth would be pleased to have a woman with her when the baby came. When I told her what the lady next door had said, she was pleased about it. The night passed with Elizabeth sleeping in my arms. We talked ourselves to sleep, about all the

things we were going to do when the baby arrived and we went back to Memphis.

The next morning, Elizabeth was trying to decide what we were going to name the baby. We had selected a lot of names we liked. Now we had to narrow it down to one name. "If it is a boy, his name is going to be John Harold Jr.," I said. Elizabeth agreed. "If it is a girl, I am going to name her Sandra," Elizabeth said. I said, "That is a good name, as long as we make it Sandra Elizabeth." Elizabeth thought for a few minutes and said, "That sounds real good." I was pleased that we had agreed and had that out of the way.

After breakfast, we walked down to the beach, holding hands. I smiled and said, "Elizabeth, I believe you are beginning to waddle." "You would be waddling, too," she said, "if you had my stomach." Elizabeth really wasn't all that big. She was carrying the baby well.

We spent most of the morning walking and sitting on the sea wall by the ocean. We returned home and had a bite to eat. Then Elizabeth and I picked up pecans. Our yard had three big paper shell pecan trees. They were everywhere in the yard. Elizabeth was doing a pretty good job of bending over and picking them up. Some times she sat on the ground. We picked up almost a bushel. I really believe Elizabeth was picking up more than I was.

We sat on the front porch of the house and listened to the music on the radio. The weather was really beautiful and pleasant. I was going to help Elizabeth fix some dinner when we could make up our mind what we wanted.

"I am cramping," she said, looking up. "I have a sharp pain." She held her stomach. That was the first time that I had heard her ever complain about pain. I jumped up and said, "Let's go to the hospital." Elizabeth said, "No. Not yet." I helped her up and she went inside the house and lay down on the bed. I sat on the edge, holding her hand. She said, "I'm fine, Harold."

All the things that you are supposed to do when you deliver a baby, went through my mind. I kept saying, "Shouldn't we go to the hospital?" Elizabeth would say, "No."

I tried to think of something to say. I had now been discharged from the Army one full day. I said, "Elizabeth, how do I look as a civilian?" Elizabeth looked at me and said, "Same as you did when you were in the Army." I said, "As soon as the baby comes, and we can travel, we'll go back to Memphis. Then we'll really be civilians."

Elizabeth grabbed my hand tight and said, "Oh, Harold. I think we had better get to the hospital." I looked at my watch. It was 6 p.m., October 17. I rushed out the door to our neighbor's house, hollering, "Mildred! Mildred, come quick! Elizabeth is going to have a baby. We have got to go to the hospital." Mildred Bailey grabbed her sweater and followed me back to the house. Elizabeth was standing there with her bag. Mildred timed the contraction pains. They were about three minutes apart.

"We had better go," Mildred told me. "Get her to the hospital."

I thought I was ready but everything was wrong. I couldn't find my car keys. I had them in my pocket. I picked up the wrong bag and took it to the car. I had to take it back in the house and get the right one. Mildred found it in the middle of the floor where Elizabeth was standing. I got Elizabeth to the car. Then Mildred followed. I jumped in, after seeing that Elizabeth was in okay, and took off for the hospital. Elizabeth said, "Take it easy, driving. We want to get to the hospital."

As we walked into the hospital, a nurse helped Elizabeth into a wheel chair, and told me to go to the front desk and register her. "I'll take care of your wife, and get her to a room," the nurse said. "Everything will be fine." The nurse rolled Elizabeth onto the elevator and they disappeared.

Mildred Bailey took me by the arm and pulled me toward the registration desk. We walked arm in arm. The lady behind the desk looked at me. I had Elizabeth's bag in my hand. I said, "My wife is about to have a baby." The lady behind the desk looked at Mildred and asked Mildred what her name was. Mildred told her that her name was Mildred Bailey. The lady behind the desk looked at her and said, "You don't look like you are going to have a baby. Why are you here?"

I said, "You don't understand. This lady is not my wife." This was confusing to her. I said, "Look, lady, the nurse just took my wife to a room. I want to check her in." "Oh!" she said. "I thought this woman was your wife." She laughed and filled out the forms and said I could go up and take my wife her bag.

Dr. Treudore met Mildred and me in the corridor near Elizabeth's room. He said Elizabeth would have the baby some time in the early morning. "I'm sure it won't be tonight," he said. Mildred and I went to Elizabeth's room and stayed with her until 10 o'clock. The nurse almost pushed us out of the room. I dropped Mildred off at her home and then I went home, fell across the bed

and went to sleep. It was 6 a.m. before I knew anything else. I looked at my watch, tried to wash up a little, and rushed out to the car. I drove as fast as I could to the hospital.

I walked into Elizabeth's room. She was asleep. I held her hand a minute. I didn't want to wake her. I walked out in the corridor. The nurse stopped me and said, "Are you Mr. Robinson?" I said, "Yes."

The nurse said, "Your wife had a baby girl at 2 o'clock this morning. The baby was fine. Your wife is doing just great." Then she walked on. I couldn't speak for a few seconds. I turned and rushed back to Elizabeth and held her hand and kissed her.

Elizabeth woke up and looked at me. She was so very pretty, lying there. "Have you seen our beautiful baby girl?" she said. I said, "No, but I will. How are you?"

A nurse said, "I'll bring the baby." She came back in a few minutes with our baby girl in her arms, and gave her to Elizabeth. Sandra Elizabeth, in Elizabeth's arms, was the most beautiful sight that I had ever seen. I could even see the halo glowing around Elizabeth again. Sandra was the most beautiful blond baby girl in the world. No one in the world was as happy as I was at that moment.

Doctor Treudore told me that everything was fine but he wanted Elizabeth to stay in the hospital for five days. He just wanted to make sure she got all the care that she might need. I didn't know what I would do without Elizabeth for five days. I wanted to take her home and take care of her myself.

I lived in the hospital room with Elizabeth during the day, and drove home to a lonely house at night. The fourth day came and the doctor said that Elizabeth was doing so well that she could go home tomorrow morning. I tried to get everything ready at home for Elizabeth's arrival. I bought some flowers and had the place all fixed up.

I went to the hospital on the morning of the fifth day and brought my wife and baby home.

Elizabeth was so happy to be home with the baby and me. I tried to keep her in bed most of the time for the next few days but it was impossible. I washed diapers six times a day. Elizabeth would change the baby ever minute. Between preparing bottles, mixing formula, washing diapers, and fixing something to eat, our days were racing by. We were as happy as we could possibly be.

Sandra Elizabeth was sleeping most of the night in the pretty laundry basket that Elizabeth had fixed by our bed.

We would spend our time playing with her in the late evenings. It made her sleep at night. In a few days, we were walking and carrying the baby around Biloxi with us. Elizabeth and I loved to walk with the baby, just to show her off to everyone. I even think the baby liked to hear the ocean.

On the tenth day, Elizabeth said, "I am ready to go home. Let's pack and go to Memphis. I feel well enough to make the trip." I said, "Are you sure? Maybe we should see the doctor first." "No, let's go," she said.

This was what I had been waiting to hear.

We began packing the car. I filled the trunk. I didn't realize we had accumulated so many things until I started packing. I couldn't get everything in. Elizabeth put the basket with the baby on the right side of the seat and wedged it in between the back of the seat and the dash board. I had tied everything that I couldn't get in the car onto the top of the car and on the rear and front bumpers. I had been saving gasoline ration stamps. I knew we could get enough gasoline to make the trip. I wasn't so sure about the tires.

Elizabeth got in the front seat in the middle with the gear shift between her legs. Then I got in and we were off for Memphis. I repaired three flat tires on the way but we arrived home safe and sound, ending our adventure that had taken us three years to complete.

We were happy and ready to start a new life together.

God in heaven had told me that I would return. I had believed strongly enough - and He had kept His word.

God had given me a reason to live.

The End

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Here is the desperate clinging to a hope that the day will come when the one great love of his life, Elizabeth, his one reason to live, will be united with him again. Here are the frustrations and the temptations encountered by young men in strange cities.

Here, finally, is the deep and joyful love for a woman who becomes the center of a man's hope of survival.

## About the Author

"The single most potent force in my life is the love and endurance that my wife has had for me over the years," says first-time author, John H. Robinson of Memphis, Tennessee.

After World War II, John and his wife, Elizabeth, raised three daughters and a son.

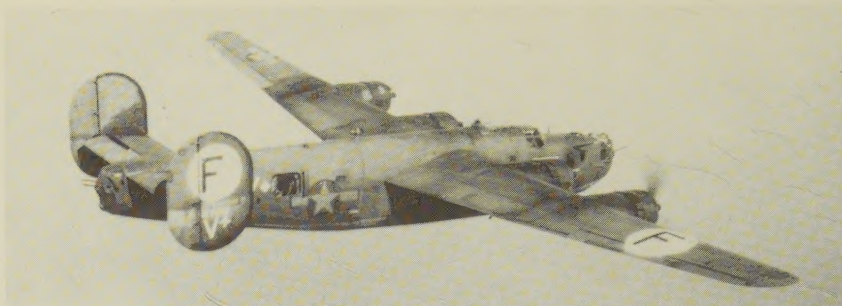
Retiring in 1987 from a career as a professional engineer, his children raised, he dusted off his old war pictures and diary and put together a true story of his experiences during the historic Forties, a story that he felt told about the average young man caught up in the war.

"It seemed to be the story that any young soldier in any war could have told," he said. "Any soldier can find himself in it."

## Castle Books

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*Jimmy Stewart had been picking all the worst combat missions to fly. We heard rumors that our High Command didn't like that.*

*Elizabeth filled my mind - whenever I could shake the memory of flak and swarms of enemy planes attacking us. If I didn't get letters from Elizabeth and read them over and over, I knew I would lose my mind. She was my guardian angel. Before taking off on combat missions I always put my beautiful wife's picture and my little Bible in my left shirt pocket.*

*A Reason to Live*, written more than forty years after the guns of the Second World War fell silent, is that rare look at war as seen through eyes and hearts of enlisted men. Very few Air Force enlisted men have written of their wartime experiences. Most writers are retired generals and other officers who tell mostly about operational and tactical matters, which although important and interesting, often fail to express the human dimension of war with the remarkable depth of feeling found in *A Reason to Live*.



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